KEATS

ISABELLA

AND

THE EVE OF St. AGNES

Edited with Critical Introduction
and Full Explanatory Notes

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CONTENTS

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PREFACE

We hardly owe an apology to the reading public for one more edition of Keats's most popular poems : *Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*, when a number of editions, particularly of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, are already available in the market. Our only excuse would be, as long as books continue to be 'fresh woods and pastures new' where admission is in no way restricted, everybody may roam through these fair fields and pluck the flowers as he chooses. Literature and the study of literature need not be anybody's monopoly. In editing these two poems we have attempted to convey what *we* think and feel about the poems, instead of merely quoting or referring to what others have said about them. If our edition does not profess to be very scholarly, we feel sure it is highly personal, and we have taken particular care to see that our Introduction and Notes suggest much more than they actually explain or illustrate. We should very much like the reader to follow his own interpretation of the poems as far as possible and to enjoy the same liberty which we have claimed for ourselves in the study of literature. After all books can beget books in the normal course of things and we feel happy to acknowledge with gratitude the debt we owe to the writers whose books we have

consulted in preparing this edition of Keats's poems. We also like to add that whenever we felt that the writers had expressed our ideas better than we could hope to do, we did not hesitate to borrow from them *ad verbum.* We thank most sincerely Mr. M. N. Kulkarni of the Karnatak Press, for giving us an opportunity of preparing this edition of Keats's poems and for placing at our disposal all available help.

Here is a list of books one would do well to read in studying Keats :—

(1) *A History of English Literature* : By A. Compton-Rickett.
(2) *The Making of English Literature* : By W. H. Crawshaw.
(3) *Keats's Craftsmanship* : By M. R. Ridley.
(4) *Keats* : By Sydney Colvin.
(5) *Keats* : By Ivor Evans.
(6) *Keats's Isabella and Eve of St. Agnes* : By R. K. Lagu.
(7) *The Eve of St. Agnes* : By C. J. Sisson.

EDITORS.

INTRODUCTION

I—KEATS : LIFE, INFLUENCES AND PERSONALITY

The youngest of the younger trio of the poets of the Romantic Revival, John Keats was born in England—Moorfields, London, in October 1795, but like his comrades, Byron and Shelley, was destined to die in a foreign land and to leave a name among the immortals. He does not seem to have inherited his poetic genius from his parents. His father was a shrewd, careful man of business, and his mother, a lively young woman fond of enjoyment. The child, on its part, grew up to be a passionate lover of the beautiful.

In popular imagination Keats is associated with delicacy and tenderness. As a matter of fact, he was a bright, enthusiastic youth fond of outdoor sports. Fighting was his special hobby. "He would fight anyone, morning, noon, and night." In his fourteenth year he laid his hands on Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary* which held him spell-bound. All his energy, which was so far devoted to games, was now turned to books. Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* lent to him by his friend, Cowden Clarke, was his next attraction. "He romped like a young horse turned into a spring meadow, revelling in the rhythmic beauties and sensuous charms

of the romantic epic." After Spenser came Homer whom he read in Chapman's translation. Keats expressed his delight and admiration for Homer's work in his famous sonnet, a few lines from which can be quoted with advantage here :—

> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,
> When a new planet swims into his ken ;
> Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
> He stared at the Pacific ......
> Silent upon a peak in Darien.

In the meanwhile, after the death of his father, when he was still a lad, he was apprenticed to a surgeon, one Mr. Hammond, who lived at Edmonton. The medical profession, however, had no fascination for him and all his leisure was devoted to literature. "We find him 'a dresser' at Guy's Hospital, assisting the surgeons and dreaming of fairyland all the while, with a detachment of mind that would have horrified both the operator and the patient, had they known about it."

In 1816 Keats made friends with Leigh Hunt and followed up the friendship with a close acquaintance with Lamb, Wordsworth and the painter, Robert Haydon. Soon "he was in a circle where great spirits abounded," who fostered his interest and delight in literature, especially poetry. About the same time he met Shelley, who was greatly struck by his genius. Though Keats did not take very kindly to Shelley, Shelley's admiration for his younger compeer is treasured in his splendid elegy, *Adonais*.

In 1817 the first volume of Keats's *Poems* was published, and the next year saw the birth of *Endymion*, his first serious adventure in the field of poetry. It was most savagely criticized by the editors of the *Quarterly* and *Blackwood*, and it is generally believed that he took the criticism

to heart. As Byron believed, his life was 'snuffed out by an article.' Keats himself gave the direct lie to this statement. In one of his letters he wrote, "In *Endymion* I leapt headlong into the sea and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea and comfortable advice. I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest.. ....Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty, in the abstract, makes him a severe critic of his own works."

Much greater misfortunes were in store for Keats. In 1818 his brother, Tom, died of consumption and his other brother, George, sailed to America in search of fortune. Keats himself fell desperately in love with Fanny Brawne who failed fully to requite his love and to share his poetic delights. Consumption, which had lain dormant so long, now showed unmistakable symptoms and Keats had to leave England for Italy in search of health. His dear friend, Joseph Severn, kept him company on the continent and nursed him in his illness. Nothing, however, could save him from the grip of death, and early in 1821 he passed away in the arms of his loyal, tender-hearted friend, Severn. He was buried in the beautiful Protestant Cemetery at Rome.

The whole of Keats's poetry is contained in two volumes: *Poems* of 1817 and another volume of *Poems* published in 1820. In the field of narrative poetry his name is associated with *Lamia, Isabella,* and *The Eve of St. Agnes. Hyperion,* a splendid fragment, and *The Fall of Hyperion* are his only efforts in epic poetry. He wrote a few sonnets and a few great odes amongst which *Ode to a Nightingale, To Autumn,* and *Ode on a Grecian Urn* are the most remarkable achievements. In mere quantity Keats can never

stand any comparison with his contemporaries—Shelley, Byron, Scott, and Wordsworth. But in quality his best work in narrative and lyrical poetry is worth its weight in gold. One can only imagine what a master poet Keats would have been, if he had been fortunate enough to live to a mature age. His own epitaph reads—" Here lies one whose name was writ in water." Perhaps no name in English Literature was writ to endure longer. Conscious of his undeveloped powers he modestly said, " I think I shall be among the English poets after my death." Matthew Arnold adds, " he is ; he is with Shakespeare."

This short sketch of Keats's life and work will convince the reader that his poetic reputation was of his own making. From his parents he, in no way, inherited his love of art and his passion for beauty. His friends cannot be credited with having created a love of poetry in his youthful mind. Perhaps Homer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and later on Milton were his best sources of inspiration. His guardians had planned that he should be an apprentice to a surgeon, intending him to take up the medical profession, but Keats developed into a poet of the first order. In a small measure like Milton he ploughed his lonely furrow, and his soul was like a star that lived apart. Unlike Shelley and Byron, he had no taste for politics, for social questions, for philosophical problems, for purely abstract ideas. He was born to be simply a poet. His only great passion was for beauty—in nature, in human life, and in the ideal world of imagination. He developed a poet par excellence.

Keats's untimely death was a great misfortune to English Literature. Just when he was developing excellent poetic powers, his career was cut short, and the reader is left to judge him more by the promise of his work than his actual performance in the field of poetry. Nothing but genuine

sympathy for the young aspiring poet, the ardent devotee at the shrine of beauty, can disclose the treasures of his poetic art.

II—A GENERAL APPROACH TO KEATS'S POETRY

The one fact, that emerges prominently from the study of Keats's more popular poems, is the promise of perfection he held out to the reader. He suffered from a number of handicaps during his short life. The loss of parents at an early age, the indifferent attitude of his guardians in the choice of vocation, the want of systematic education in his boyhood, the absence of a wise friend to guide him in the intricate ways of the world, and his poor weak health towards the end of his life—all these hampered in a very large measure, the growth of his poetic faculties. A certain degree of *immaturity* was inevitable in the work of a poet who had to struggle so hard against his environment. Most of Keats's poems clearly reveal this want of perfection, both in thought and expression. Even a cursory reading of Keats's *Isabella* will expose the shortcomings of the young aspiring poet. It should be noted, however, that mere concentration on the faults of his poetry will lead us nowhere in the study of Keats's poety. A sympathetic understanding, on the other hand, of the circumstances of his life, the aspirations of his heart and the impediments in his way will enable us to appreciate the glory and grandeur of the soul of which he caught glimpses, but which unfortunately he could not fully realise.

Keats entertained a very high idea of the poet's calling. To him, the poet is not merely a dreamer, nor " an idle singer

of an empty lay." He has to come down from his fairyland to the earth, identify himself with the world, and develop a universal sympathy for suffering humanity. Then alone could he hope to understand the secrets of human life. As he puts it in *The Fall of Hyperion* :—

"The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.
The one pours out a balm upon the world,
The other vexes it ......"

"None can usurp this height, ...
But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest."

This noble conception of poetry, as a sympathetic interpretation of the problems of life, he illustrated in his great odes, his splendid fragment of epic poetry, and his famous sonnets. Keats also believed that such great poetry could be written only in inspired moments. *Spontaneity*, therefore, is an essential attribute of noble poetry. Keats puts the matter pithily in one of his letters : "Unless poetry came like leaves to the tree, it had better not come at all." At the same time, he was fully aware that these heights could be reached only on rare occasions. And before he could attain to these peaks of glory, he had to tread a long weary way, encountering a number of obstacles. The way to these spiritual delights lay through the world of beauty, of nature and of human life, of which he himself is the best known singer.

Sensuousness is admittedly the most prominent quality of Keats's poems. Beautiful sounds and beautiful pictures are more than a poetic ornament to him. They constitute a delight in themselves. Not in vain did he play, in the words

of Stevenson, "the sedulous ape" to the Poet of Poets—Edmund Spenser. Spenser's pastoral sweetness of verse and sensuous delight in pictures are fully reflected in the poems of his devoted disciple. Sweet sensations are a fascination to him, and he yearns for them. "O for a life of sweet sensations rather than of thoughts!", was his earnest cry. He often spoke of "bursting the grape of joy against one's palate fine", and added, "I feel the daisies growing over my grave". Nature and life, he approached through his senses. Music, colour, flavour, fragrance, sympathy and friendship, warmth and love amply appealed to his heart, and he did not worry about the deeper meaning and ethical purpose of the working of Nature or of the human mind. Where Wordsworth spiritualises and Shelley intellectualises Nature, Keats is content to express her through the senses: the colour, the scent, the touch, the pulsating music—these are the things that stir him to the depths of his soul. His most notable divergence as a poet from his contemporary, Shelley, is that he elects as a rule, to deal with sensations rather than with ideas, with concrete life than with abstract imaginings. His sight and hearing respond to ideas; touch to sensations. Not that he eschews ideas, the *Odes* eloquently give the lie to such a suggestion; but when he elects to deal with ideas, he chooses such human things as love, sorrow, life, and beauty, and presents them in concrete shape.

Exuberance would be the most natural corollary to a life of sensations, and the most natural attribute of youthful poetry. Whether it is a matter of suggesting feelings or of describing things, Keats seems to work like an enthusiastic painter adding touch after touch, shade after shade, till a splendid picture is reared up in the imagination of the reader. This rich excess of his poetry would remind the reader of the splendour of the Elizabethan Verse.

"In his delight in mystery and marvel, in his joy in colour and beauty of phrase, in his presentation of picturesque vivid detail, warmed and fused with human sentiment, in his love of the rich deeply charged epithet, and in the harmony of sound and music of metre, he is a true Elizabethan." He himself has referred to this quality of "loading every rift of a subject with ore", which, in plain language, can be described as a continual positive poetic richness and felicity of phrase.

Like Scott, Keats was little in harmony with the great tendencies of his age—the great life-currents which created the splendid era—the Romantic Revival in English Poetry. Unlike Shelley, he was not stirred by Revolutionary ideas, which had taken hold of the popular mind. Even his *romanticism* is characterised by his own individuality. "He was seeking his first inspiration, not so much in the medievalism of Scott, in the orientalism of Byron, in the poetic idealism of Shelley, or in the psychological wonder world of Coleridge as in the pure and perfect beauty of ancient Greece." Greek life and Greek culture—*Hellenism*, was, in fact, to Keats an idea to conjure with. Though he was not fortunate enough, like Milton before him and Arnold after him, to go straight to these rich treasures—read Greek in the original, he made the best use of his second-hand acquaintance with Greek literature. His sonnet on *Chapman's Homer* is a glowing tribute to Homer's poetry. Greek worship of beauty, Greek interest in earthly life and pagan delight in the loveliness of Nature and the aspects of skies, in fact, everything Greek was freely imbibed by the young poet. Often is he fitly called the most Greek of English Poets. *The Eve of St. Agnes* bears vivid testimony to the Greek spirit of John Keats. Next to the Greek influence in Keats's poetry would come his *love of Italian and medieval romance.* Boccaccio

and other masters of melodious prose in Italian literature exercised the greatest fascination on his youthful mind ; and in his own words he lay "in lap of legends old" of medieval Europe. His longer narrative poems, *Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, Endymion, Lamia, The Eve of St. Mark,* and his two versions of *Hyperion* are the outcome of his study of the legends of Greece, Italy, and medieval Europe.

Though we have talked of Keats's individual romanticism, he possessed a highly *eclectic genius* among English poets. Starting with the pursuit of Beauty, wedded to Truth in the last stage of his poetic development, Keats never hesitated to borrow from different sources whatever was noble and beautiful in life and nature. The ancients taught him the worship of beauty and the rich significance of human life ; Spenser ushered him into the fairy world ; the medieval romances revealed to him the glory that was chivalry ; Shakespeare showed the wonder and bloom of the world and initiated him into the mystery of evil in human life ; and lastly, Milton brought home to him the dignity of human idealism. Perhaps no poet in English literature is so rich in reminiscence as John Keats.

In the last analysis, *beauty* is the supreme object of Keats's poetry. Beauty is its essential quality. He began by loving sensuous beauty but ultimately came to love the beauty that is intellectual and spiritual. It is this that gives us the fairest promise that he might have been among the very highest, as he is among the most exquisite of pure poets. His *Endymion* begins with the words "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever!" In *Hyperion* he rises to a larger sweep of thought and declares :

"............ It 's the eternal law
That first in beauty should be first in might".

He finely clinches the idea in his famous *Ode on a Grecian Urn* :

> Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty—that's all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know

III—THE NARRATIVE POETRY

Narrative Poetry owes its birth to the narrative instinct in the human heart. Whether we look to the earliest form of human civilization, marked by absolute simplicity, or we look to the most developed forms of civilization in modern times, marked by great complexity, the instinct has been constantly at work producing simple or complex narratives, according as they belong to old or modern times. In the course of social evolution, when individuals were formed into groups and groups into societies, the narrative instinct was found to be highly useful—a great source of recreation. The story-teller in prose or verse, who could claim the attention of the audience, was an indispensable figure. The bard or the poet, who could compose a song himself or sing a song handed down by tradition, was much in demand, particularly on festive occasions—religious feasts or social festivals. Even a conquest could not be complete without the story of the conquest being composed and sung by the bard. This is the way narrative poetry came into being. It can be easily seen at this stage how narrative poetry assumed two forms in general : one, in which the poet or the bard gave his own experience—his thoughts, feelings, and ideas ;—the other in which he gave the story of the experiences of other people, of the world around him.

Traditionally, therefore, narrative poetry came to be subjective and objective.

The simplest form of narrative poetry, in the early stages of human civilization, was the lay—a short story in verse, often musical, full of action and dramatic vigour. It narrated a thrilling deed of valour, a touching story of love, or a noble act of sacrifice. It was essentially simple in thought, feeling and expression, with a music that never failed to appeal to the audience. As the lays accumulated and were handed down from generation to generation, they served as excellent material for a more elaborate and dignified form of narrative poetry—the epic. The epic, in its essentials, can be described as the story of great deeds of great men written in a grand manner. The substance of the story, the character, the manner of narration—all are lifted to a higher plane here. The epic may thus be described, in a very general manner, as a magnified and artistic form of the lay. But in their essence both the lay and the epic are the same. They are the expression of the heroic life of a heroic age. Every nation, which boasts of a civilization and a literature, has given to the world its ballad and epic poetry. India's epics are the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat*. Greece produced the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Italy gave the *Æneid* and *Divina Comedia*; England is proud of her epics, *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost*. The typical German epic is *Nibelungenlied* and France prizes her *Chanson de Roland*.

Romance is another form of narrative poetry. If the epic belongs to the heroic age of a nation, normally the earlier centuries of the medieval times, the romance belongs to the age of chivalry, the later centuries of medieval times. The epic is weighty and solid in its matter, dealing with the facts of human existence and with men and women, inspired

by a lofty purpose in life. The romance, on the other hand, creates its own fairy land, its strange, mysterious world, full of handsome men and beautiful women playing pre-eminently the game of love. Adventures in the romances are undertaken in the cause of love for fair women instead of in the cause of institutions or nations. If the epic could be described as the product of the poet's imagination, the romance is the result of the poet's fantasy. The works of Tasso and Ariosto in Italy, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the stories of King Arthur and his Round Table, the adventures of Charlemagne and his Paladins, and Scott's poems like *Marmion, The Lady of the Lake*, and *Rokeby* are notable instances in the field of romance.

In England, narrative poetry may be said to have started with the Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf*. The next step was taken by medieval romances like *Gawain and the Green Knight*. Chaucer is the next prominent story-teller in verse in his *Canterbury Tales*. Spenser followed Chaucer with his *Faerie Queene* and was in turn followed by Shakespeare, who wrote his splendid tales, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. Then we may mention the magnificent poems of Milton, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, the greatest epics that England has produced. The eighteenth century was prominently an era of prose, and we may straightway jump to the 19th century in which Wordsworth, Scott, Shelley, Byron, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold, and Morris have produced narrative poetry. In a very general way the narrative poetry of the 19th century divides itself into the *subjective* and the *objective* varieties. The poems of Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron and Browning are to a very large extent subjective ; they deal with the poet's spiritual experiences. The poems of Keats, Tennyson, Morris, Arnold, on the other hand, tell the stories of other people

and their deeds, and in doing so they may often interpret them in the light of their idealistic principles. The objective element in these stories is unmistakable. Keats's *Isabella* is based on a story from the Italian writer, Boccaccio, while *The Eve of St. Agnes* is founded on old superstitions and traditions associated with St. Agnes' Day. In narrating these stories, Keats has not missed the opportunity of illustrating his favourite principle—the worship of beauty and its delight to the soul.

We have considered so far the different forms of narrative poetry, and we may now turn to the essentials of this form. First and foremost, it is a story, which we expect to be highly interesting and satisfying. The first business of the story-teller should be to create interest, to sustain it, and to satisfy it in the end. If he deviates towards the end from the natural expectations of the reader, he has to put forth some satisfactory explanation. He cannot afford to be whimsical or capricious in developing his story. In short, the story should be gripping, touching, appealing or pleasing, as the writer chooses to work it out. The interest of the story will mainly depend upon the different threads woven into a fine fabric in the narration, and the variety of characters playing their part in the story. *Action*, briskly moving and often intricate, and *character*, vividly painted and variously represented, would be the chief sources of the interest of the story. The larger the variety of incidents and of characters, the greater the claim the story can have on the attention and curiosity of the reader. If we add to this, the art of creating a suitable atmosphere and a suitable style, the paraphernalia of the narrator's art is complete. The stories based upon old legends and superstitions require old-world associations; stories of medieval life will appear to advantage if the world of chivalry is

painted as their background ; and modern stories must needs have the atmosphere of science and machinery. As to language, the current coin of the realm will have a telling effect. A perfect harmony between action and character, style and atmosphere, is the highest ideal of an expert story-teller.

It now remains to be seen how Keats has handled his stories in the two poems—*Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes.*

IV—ROMANTICISM IN ENGLISH POETRY

(Mainly based on C. H. Herford's *Age of Wordsworth.*)

It is justly said that "by nothing is England so great as by her poetry", and to this spiritual greatness the contribution of the poets of the Romantic Revival—Wordsworth and his band, is simply supreme. This splendid era of poetry is variously described : some call it the "revival of romance", others the "return to nature", while to a few, like Watts-Dunton, it is the "renaissance of wonder." Each one of the descriptions emphasises a prominent element of the poetic movement. It may be the deep sense of wonder, or mystery, or the genuine love of the loveliness of Nature. Primarily it is an extraordinary development of poetic imagination and poetic feeling. The glory of lake and mountain, the grace of childhood, the dignity of the untaught peasant, the mystery of the Gothic aisle, the radiance of Attic marble—all these were springs of the poet's inspiration and the artist's joy. These sources of poetry were strange ways of escape from the dead weight of routine. They freed men from "the prison of the actual" and gave a glimpse of reality at a higher point.

The Romantic Movement in England was a part of a much larger movement on the continent, embracing poetry, politics, philosophy, and religion, which was immensely influenced by the doctrines of Rousseau in the social field and of Kant in the field of philosophy. Rousseau introduced two great ideas into the field of European thought: the worth and dignity of man as man, and the power of nature to respond to human needs. He also suggested a vision of the healing power of love. These ideas of humanism were developed with increased richness and subtlety in romantic poetry. Childhood is idealised by Blake and Wordsworth; freedom and passion inspired the verse of Byron and Shelley; the worship of beauty is the theme of Keats's poetry. Thus were developed the harmonies between man and external nature.

Although the poets of this era were all moved in the main by the same general spirit, the work of each of the great poets was surprisingly distinct and peculiar. *Individualism* was in the air and was rapidly permeating the whole mass of society. Even the literary expression of this individualistic spirit was a further development of the general tendencies of the era. Wordsworth was pre-eminently the high-priest of Nature; Coleridge the poet of the supernatural; Scott the prince of historical romance; Byron the passionate lover of freedom; and young Keats the apostle of beauty. From the simple utterances of Wordsworth to the mystic rhapsodies of Shelley, there is as large a variety of poetic expression as one may conceive. Between the two extremes lie the sweet melodies of Keats in his beautiful lyrical passages.

Between the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, in 1798, which marked the beginning of the Romantic Movement, and the early poems of Tennyson, which closed this glori-

ous era, a change came over the significance of romanticism. To the love of Nature was added the study and appreciation of Art. As Walter Savage Landor put it, "Nature I loved and next to Nature, Art". The appeal of beauty in nature and life was thus extended to painting, architecture and sculpture. Keats's appreciation of architecture and of painting in *The Eve of St. Agnes* is an instance in point.

The romantic style presents its object not simply and directly, but through a glamour of imagery and emotion. The romantic poet sees all things in the light of their larger relations, transcends all distinctions, expresses by figure and metaphor, and mingles a lyric personality with the object of his descriptions.

The chief glory of romanticism, however, lay in the extraordinarily various, intimate, and subtle interpretation of the world of external nature and of that other world of wonder and romance, which the familiar companionship of nature creates in the mind of man. Nature is an inexhaustible source of lovely imaginings. Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats are all masters of that region where nature and romance meet. It is brought to the notice of the reader that though the two poems, *Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*, deal essentially with love, its joy and suffering, its hopes and fears, Keats misses no opportunity to describe the loveliness of Nature.

N.B. Before proceeding to a critical appreciation of the two poems, the student will do well to go carefully through the earlier portions of the Introduction, noting particularly the influences which shaped Keats's genius, the chief characteristics of his poetry, the essentials of a narrative poem, and lastly, the nature of romanticism in English Verse.

It is a fortunate circumstance, indeed, that the student has to read *Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes* together. It will exactly illustrate the point we have been working out in our approach to Keats's poetry. His poetry is to be judged more by

the excellent promise he offers than by his actual performance in the field of poetry. As one passes from *Isabella* to *The Eve of St. Agnes,* one cannot but realise that one goes from an imperfect piece of art to one that is perfect and flawless. The poems represent two distinct stages in the development of Keats's achievement.

V — *ISABELLA* — A CRITICAL APPRECIATION

Isabella was begun in the early part of 1818 and was finished by April of that year. It thus comes at least seven or eight months before the opening of Keats's great creative period and is, in many respects, linked with *Endymion,* though it ultimately appeared in the volume of *Poems* of 1820. Like *Endymion* it is marked by many imperfections. At this time Keats was engaged in collaboration with Reynolds in translating in verse tales of Boccaccio from his *Decameron.* Keats selected the fifth tale of the fourth day for the subject-matter of his poem *Isabella.*

Metre :

The first approach to a good poem lies through its sounds. We must read the poem and listen to its music. *Isabella,* in this respect, will not altogether disappoint us. The metre chosen for the poem is *Ottava Rima*—definitely an ambitious stanza. It was effectively used by Byron in both *Beppo* and *Don Juan,* and by Fairfax in his translation of Tasso. It is a stanza of eight lines which naturally divides itself into a sestet (group of six lines) and a couplet. The first six lines give us only two rhymes—one for the odd lines, the other for the even lines. The couplet gives the third rhyme of the stanza. The minimum number of rhymes contributes to the impression of unity of the whole stanza. The line normally consists of ten syllables and the normal

run of the line is iambic. Keats, however, is careful to avoid the monotony of the iambic foot and replaces it by trochee and other varieties of the two-syllabled foot. He fully realises that it is the rhythm of emotion that is more important in verse than the rigid metrical scheme. The very first line can be scanned as follows :—

Fāir Isăbĕl pōor sīmplĕ Isăbĕl !

The student should notice these delightful variations of the normal rhythm of the verse, while reading the poem. The more important fact about the stanza, however, is the effect of the couplet. "It allows the poet to make the sestet a mere prelude to a sort of clinching "snap" in the couplet, and it invites him to make the clinch even more vigorous by a change of tone between the sestet and the couplet." It goes without saying that a good pause, if not a full pause, is expected at the end of the sixth line. A sort of crescendo is worked up by the sestet, and the couplet takes us to the crest of the wave in the *Ottava Rima.* As suggested earlier, Keats was experimenting both with metre and matter, and it should be no surprise to the reader that the poem is a queer medley of good and bad stanzas. Among the good stanzas could be numbered : stanzas II, XI, XIII, XLII and others ; while the defective ones are stanzas VII, VIII, XLIV, XLIX, and a few more. For instance, in stanza II, the poet suggests the gradual growth of love between Isabella and Lorenzo by the very scheme of the stanza : the first six lines give us interesting details of their life of love, while the couplet suggests the complete absorption of Isabella's mind.

Language :

When we turn from the metre to the *language* of the

poem, we have to face practically the same problem; the imperfections are many and obvious, but, on the other hand, the happy expressions and the happy lines cannot be easily forgotten. From the very beginning, obscure words and phrases, like "seeing", (sight), "pulsed away" (drove away), "fevered" (elevated), "in fee" (as compensation), "murdered man" (man to be murdered), and others; unhappy expressions, like "young palmer in Love's eye", "rose's just domain", "if looks speak love laws", "poesied with hers in dewy rhyme", "Selfishness, Love's cousin", "hawks of shipmasts", "quick cat's paws", "amorous dark", and "serpents' whine" etc.; are almost an eye-sore, and definitely reveal the inexperience of the poet in handling his medium. But who can fail to notice the powerful satiri-comic expressions in the Byronic vein, when the poet describes Isabella's brothers? They are called "ledger-men," "money bags", "cruel clay", and "Baalites of pelf". The reader also wishes that Keats had controlled his youthful enthusiasm and had spared him unnecessary rhetoric in the poem, which, perhaps, may have been well received from the platform, but is absolutely ridiculous in a narrative poem. (Cf. stanza XVI where the poet talks about the pride of the brothers.) The addresses, also, to Boccaccio, Melancholy, Echo, and Melpomene are equally out of place and jarring. Enthusiasm also leads Keats astray in another direction. Similes and metaphors in English shine best when they are suggestive; if they are worked out in detail, they create a ludicrous effect. Keats talks of Mercy being cut "with a sharp knife", and of the hot sun "counting his dewy rosary" on the eglantine. These imperfections, however, serve as a background to show his happy use of language to great advantage. Phrases like "downy nest", "twin roses blown apart", "delicious love," "every dealer

fair", and lines like, "Honeyless days and days did pass", "the river fanned by dancing bulrush", and "Thou art distant in Humanity", have a haunting music of their own and fill the mind with sad sweet associations. Here is a master-hand already skilled in his art. Add to this the tender touching scenes where the lovers are longing to meet each other (stanza II), where the sad life of Lorenzo's spirit is described in detail (XXXIX), and lastly, where Isabella is completely absorbed in tending the Basil Plant, and the enjoyment of the poem leaves almost nothing to desire.

The Sources of the Poem :

Like Shakespeare who came before him and Tennyson who followed him later, Keats did not invent the stories of his poems but availed himself of the material ready at hand. Old tales and old legends came quite handy to him. His genius, like that of his compeers, lay in shaping and transmuting the material at hand into a beautiful creation. In *Isabella* Keats borrowed the story from Boccaccio's *Decameron.* There is evidence enough to show that Keats was also acquainted with the French Version of the story by Mirabeau. But Keats followed his own way in narrating the story. Boccaccio's narrative, in general, is "plain, simple, and downright", and creates the impression of a grim tragedy. Keats's version, on the other hand, is rich, tender, elaborate, and artistic. On a small scale he creates the effects of horror and pity, but a calm seems to fall on the mind of the reader when the storm is over.

Art of Narration :

Isabella quietly submits to the inevitable, and calmly faces her fate. Even in minor details the hand of the artist is only too clearly seen. Messina is changed into the

more famous Florence, Lisabetta into the more musical Isabella, and the number of the brothers is reduced from three to two. Two brothers, materially-minded, can create as much misery in the life of their innocent sister as three could. But the rich and elaborate treatment of the theme is particularly noticed when he rears up the picture of the "ledger men" and "money bags" in a number of stanzas power-worded. On this dark background, the fair, simple Isabel shines like a star. Her life of love, of hope, of sadness, and of despair is beautifully painted in stanza after stanza. The sad life of Lorenzo's spirit, contrasted with the warm snug life of human beings, is a marvel of transmutation. The scene of grave-digging, with its "wormy circumstance," may not be liked by many, and Keats is fully conscious of the fact. He only pleads—it is his peculiar way of describing things—for the romantic manner of supplying vivid details, which may be sometimes unpleasant and even revolting. The quiet close of the poem, when Isabella helplessly submits to her fate, is bound to create a lasting impression on the reader's mind. Deep sympathy is spontaneously felt for her in her distress.

The artistic instinct of the young poet is most clearly revealed in the unfolding of the story. The first thirteen stanzas work up the central situation, where Isabella and Lorenzo are knit together in their hearts. The reader is keenly interested in the young aspiring lovers looking forward to the fulfilment of their love. His sympathies are already enlisted on their behalf. Can we not say that the story has started *in medias res*, and that Keats was conscious of the art of master-minds, like Shakespeare and Milton, in narrating their stories? From stanzas XIV to XX we get a restrospective narration, learn what sort of men the brothers were, and how Lorenzo came to dwell in the

self-same mansion. The thread of the story is picked up in stanza XXI and the murderous plot of the brothers and its execution take us to the end of the stanza XXVIII, in which the act of the murder is narrated in one single line. Can we not trace here the Greek influence on the young poet's mind? We are afraid these fine strokes of art have not been fully noticed by Ridly, certainly a very able critic of Keats's craftsmanship. Says he in his book: "Where at the end of fourteen stanzas of ostensible narrative have we arrived? We know nothing about Isabella except that she has a full shape, that Lorenzo thinks her beautiful, that she embroiders, and that she is deeply in love. We know nothing whatever of Lorenzo except that Isabella thinks that he has a pleasant voice, that he also is deeply in love, though painfully diffident about saying so, and that he is not going to be embalmed in Indian clove. He had leisure for wandering up a western hill to admire the sunset. But as to what his position is, why he dwells in the self-same mansion as Isabella, and meets her at meals, and whether his diffidence is due to natural timidity or to inferiority in rank or to what, we have no inkling of. Surely this is no way at all to tell a story, and no wealth of incidental beauties should delude us into thinking that it is." We can only ask the reader to judge things for himself and to go to the book with an open mind.

After the murder of Lorenzo, Isabella had to pass many a sad, weary day. Then comes the revelation of the crime by Lorenzo's spirit. This is undoubtedly a reminiscence of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Isabella is put on the move, digs the grave, brings the head of her lover to her home, and enshrines it in the pot of Basil. While Isabella was hoping to spend the rest of her life in calm grief, another serious misfortune befalls her. The pot of Basil is stolen away by the wicked brothers, but they find it impossible to wash

their hands clean of the stains of blood. They perish in misery and leave their sister to die broken-hearted. Once the act of murder is over, the story moves on briskly and is very effectively handled by the young poet. The rhetorical interludes are, no doubt, out of place and mar the effect of the story. But, on the whole, there should be no hesitation in describing Keats's version as gripping and touching. Keats can be said to have very skilfully worked up the material from Boccaccio.

Characters :

In a plain, pathetic story of this type, we need not expect a large variety of character. The story centres round the fortunes of Isabella and Lorenzo, who emerge to the forefront. It is essentially a story of tragic incidents and no special attention has been paid to delineate subtleties of characterization. The very fact that even the names of the brothers are not mentioned suggests that, to the poet, they are in no way significant except as broad types of villainy. They are worshippers of Mammon, artificers of fraud, and tyrannical slave-drivers. They employ large numbers of men, who are sweating and toiling the whole day to produce wealth for their masters. Profit and prosperity are their guiding principles in life. They intend to exploit the beauty of their innocent sister to further their prosperous business ; and when Lorenzo stands in their way, they make away with him without the least qualms of conscience. Anything like literature, art, or idealism is absolutely unknown to them, They are materialistic, pure and simple. Only too late in life they realise the full force of love, which can transcend all distinctions and limitations. But nothing can mend matters at that stage, and they are doomed to eternal suffering.

Lorenzo, " of comely personage, affable and excellent in

his behaviour ", is the most loyal servant of these unworthy masters. By loyal work he gains the favour of his employers and still more draws the attention of the mistress of the house—their lovely sister. Like all youths, he is a pilgrim at the shrine of beauty and love, and aspires to win the heart of Isabella. Circumstances favour his adventure, and the love between the two young people grows like a lusty flower. Chivalrous by nature and faithful in love, he does not take undue advantage of Isabella's yielding nature. He allows her full liberty to accept or reject his love. Fully trusting his masters, he accompanies them to the forest where he falls a helpless victim to their jealous anger. Then he lives the miserable life of a spirit on the outskirts of humanity. His heart still yearns for human love and the happy company of his angelic spouse. He is destined, however, to receive the tears of sympathy and the worship of loyal love.

Isabella, the heroine of the poem, is a simple, innocent sister of the wealthy merchants in Florence. She lives in a palatial building surrounded by a beautiful garden, and resembles the queen of beauty of the old days of chivalry. But the spirit of adventure, invariably associated with these lovely ladies, is conspicuously absent in her character. We do not find her present at any tournament, nor do we find her taking part in any game of hunting. Music and embroidery are her only recreations. Entirely dependent on her brothers, she seems to be incapable of any initiative, till we see her rising to the occasion, when distress and despair have overpowered her. Her deep love for Lorenzo appears in no way unnatural, when she is allowed the company of the young handsome servant. There is nothing like a social circle for her, where she could have made a wiser choice of a partner in life. Lorenzo, however, seems quite worthy of her loyal

affection. The brothers attempted to end her love by murdering Lorenzo, but it was too deep-rooted to be eradicated by her worldly brothers. After she has learnt the secret of the murder from Lorenzo's spirit, she takes the matter in her own hands, boldly goes to the forest, digs out the grave, and brings the head of her lover back to her home. Her sole delight in life henceforward is to water the plant of Basil under which lay concealed her precious possession. The change in circumstances has worked a change in her mind. She is now bolder, braver, and more determined. She could take the initiative of which she appeared to be incapable so long. But her nature in its essence is hardly changed. She is simplicity and innocence incarnate. She did receive a rude shock when she learnt of "the brothers' bloody knife", but that only deepened her love for Lorenzo then dead. Whether living or dead, Lorenzo enjoys the worship of this faithful heart. When the Pot of Basil was stolen away by her brothers, she calmly resigned herself to her fate and faced the inevitable hour. The charming flower lay withered and crushed, but its fragrance still permeates the atmosphere.

One wonders whether any moral or meaning needs be found in this plain, pathetic poem. Its appeal consists chiefly in following the musical flow of its poetry, its sad, sorrowful incidents and in noting the ultimate triumph of loyal love over the cruel ways of the world. Its imperfections indicate that it is a poem of transition; that it is unequal in excellence like *Endymion*; that its "beauties are of parts rather than of the whole". Keats's own opinion of the poem can be found in one of his letters: "there is too much inexperience of live (life) and simplicity of knowledge in it.....*Isabella* is what I should call, were I a reviewer, 'a weak-sided poem' with an amusing sober-sad-

ness about it." All the same, its quiet beauty and sad plaintive music cannot fail to appeal to the heart of the reader. The poem can be looked upon as a fine prelude to *The Eve of St. Agnes*, wherein perfection of art has been finally attained. Mr. Ridley confirms the judgment in poetic words : "In *Isabella* the course is known, the control is being learned, and from now onwards Apollo can hand over the reins to Phæton (charioteer of the sun-god) with no apprehension of disaster."

THE EVE OF ST. AGNES — A CRITICAL STUDY

The Eve of St. Agnes, universally recognised to be a masterpiece of Keats, was one of the prominent poems in the volume of 1820. About the middle of January 1819, Keats went down to Chichester to stay with his old friend, Dilke, wherefrom, in the third week, they moved on to Bedhampton to meet Mr. John Snook, Mr. Dilke's brother-in-law. Keats fell ill there and perhaps to amuse himself indoors, "took down some thin paper and wrote on it a little poem called *St. Agnes' Eve*." Keats thought he had done "nothing worth speaking of"—the artist's own standard of excellence is often too high to be easily attained. Compared with *Hyperion,* which came before it, and with *Lamia* and the great *Odes* which followed, *The Eve of St. Agnes* may appear a shade inferior in poetic excellence. But it is infinitely superior to *Isabella* and reveals the poet's remarkable confidence in his own powers. "It has not the power of *Hyperion,* nor the sort of fire of *Lamia* ; nor has it the superb and serene mastery of the greatest of his *Odes.* But Keats (in this Poem) has at last entered triumphantly into his kingdom."

The poem deals with an old-world superstition associated with the eve of St. Agnes : that maidens may have a vision of their future partner in life at the holy midnight hour, if they practise punctiliously certain religious rites. The theme in itself hardly promises a complex story or a variety of character ; nor does Keats give us an intricately interesting story or any very large variety of character. The supreme charm of the poem lies in the creation of the old world of medieval times with its magic and mystery, pomp and splendour, and its love and hatred. This atmosphere of supreme enchantment in the poem is created by a series of sensuous pictures, which, as has been already pointed out, is the special excellence of Keats's poetry. Add to the beauty of the pictures the sweet music of verse, and we shall get all that we expect in this beautiful poem.

Copies of the Poem :

It is interesting to note that besides the printed version of the 1820 volume, four written copies of the poem are available ; (1) a copy in Keats's own handwriting ; (2) a transcript (reproduction) by Woodhouse ; (3) another transcript by Woodhouse ; and (4) a transcript by George Keats. Ridley's close examination of these manuscripts in his study of Keats will convince the reader how carefully and scrupulously Keats prepared the final form of the poem. The result of this revision is indeed very satisfactory and Keats has attained the perfection he desired in his *Eve of St. Agnes*. Practically all readers agree that only two expressions in the poem have remained obscure. They are—

> " The Music, yearning like a God in pain ",

and

> " Never on such a night have lovers met,
> Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt."

Metre :

The stanza used in the poem is known as the Spenserian Stanza—the stanza of Spenser's *Faerie Queene.* It is a stanza of nine lines, the first eight giving normally ten syllables, while the last one contains twelve syllables and serves always as a fitting dignified close to the whole stanza. We may note here that the nine lines share only three rhymes between them all, while the repetition of the rhyme *b* in the fifth line gives a linking effect to the rhymes which precede, and the rhymes which follow. In the same manner the rhyme *c* repeated in the eighth and the ninth lines produces the effect of a couplet. It must be remembered, however, that the last line of twelve syllables—the Alexandrine—has to produce the clinching effect. Can we not say that the Spenserian Stanza is only a step ahead of the *Ottava Rima* of *Isabella,* and that the progress in poetic experiment is steadily kept on? As in *Isabella,* the normal run of the line is iambic, though the iamb is often changed into trochee or spondee as the sense demands. The monotony of the iambic foot is, of course, skilfully avoided. To illustrate our point, we take the last two lines of the first stanza, and scan them in the following manner :—

"Sēemed takĭng flīght fŏr hēavĕn wĭthōut dēath,
Pāst thĕ swēet vīrgĭn's pictŭre whĭle hĭs prāyĕr hĕ sāyeth."

The delight of the Spenserian Stanza first consists in its association with the romantic poem, *Faerie Queene* ; then in the ample scope it gives the poet to work out a single picture, in all its richness, in a single stanza ; and lastly, in the uniformly sweet music, which Spenser has breathed into this ambitious stanza. It is so well suited to the contemplative reminiscent mood of a sensitive poet. Keats as a devoted dis-

ciple of his great master, Spenser, soon mastered the secrets of delight of the stanza and exploited them fully in his poem. It is difficult indeed to choose any particular stanza in this poem of uniform excellence as specially good. We may only point out a few as specimens : stanzas IX, XVI, XVII, XXIV, XXV, XXX, XXXIII, XXXVI, XXXVIII. Another thing worth noting in the management of the stanza by Keats is that he fully enjoys the liberty of shifting the pause wherever he needs. No doubt there are a number of lines where the pause comes at the end ; but there are others where the pause, even a full pause, comes very soon after the beginning of the line. As stated earlier, it is the rhythm of sense and emotion that ultimately dominates the mechanical devices of the metre.

Language :

The Eve of St. Agnes is an unsurpassed example—some are inclined to call it unequalled—of the pure charm of verse. Words, phrases, single lines and stanzas are presented in rain-bow colours. In his own words, Keats loads 'every rift with ore.' Colours, images and associations are richly scattered in the poem in imitation of the bountifulness of Nature. It is deep-damasked tapestry-work in words. Here are a few illustrations. Music is credited with a 'golden tongue' ; midnight possesses its own sweetness : "the honeyed middle of the night" ; Madeline is "hood-winked with fairy fancy" ; Porphyro's heart is "love's feverous citadel" ; there are "dwarfish Hildebrands" among the guests ; Porphyro must be "liege-lord of all the elves and fays" ; his "lady fair the conjuror plays" ; Madeline is "asleep in lap of legends old ;" "pale enchantment held her sleepy-eyed" ; the maiden's chamber is "silken, hushed and chaste" ; her

heart was "voluble paining with eloquence her balmy side"; the window-panes are "the tiger-moth's deep-damasked wings"; there is "a shielded scutcheon blushed with blood of queens and kings"; Madeline, at the retiring hour, "is half-hidden like a mermaid in a sea-weed"; in her sleep she is "as though a rose should shut and be a bud again"; Porphyro arose "ethereal, flushed and like a throbbing star"; he wants to be "beauty's shield, heart-shaped, and vermeil-dyed". The list can never be complete; the more we plunge into the deep, the more shall we be rewarded with such pearls.

A few lines we should like to describe as sculpture in words. Full figures are presented to the reader's imagination; e.g.—

"The carved angels, ever eager-eyed,
Stared, where upon their heads the cornice rests,
With hair blown back, and wings put cross-wise
on their breasts."....(IV)

"When Madeline, St. Agnes' charmed maid,
Rose, like a mission'd spirit, unaware:
With silver taper's light, and pious care,"....(XXII)

"As though a tongueless nightingale should swell
Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell".
(XXIII)

There are a few lines, like—

"The joys of all his life were said and sung";
"And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep";
"And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake";
"and like a throbbing star
Seen amid the sapphire heaven's deep repose";

which are so enchanting that the reader's pleasure, first and last, lies in reading and re-reading them. Perhaps he may refuse to analyse his mystic joy.

Sources :

As suggested in our appreciation of *Isabella,* Keats's genius lay in transmuting the material he borrowed from different sources. This is more prominently seen in *The Eve of St. Agnes.* Once a poem becomes popular or a writer becomes famous, a number of works and writers, mainly of minor importance, try to claim a share of the greatness achieved by the popular poem and the famous writer. These claims, howsoever justified they might be, cannot deprive a master-mind of his originality and glory. A number of sources are suggested for *St. Agnes' Eve. The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Mrs. Radcliffe, Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet, The Arabian Nights,* Milton's *Paradise Lost,* Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo,* Brand's *Popular Antiquities,* Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* form the formidable list. Ben Jonson is Brand's original, while a mysterious Mrs. Jones is credited with having suggested the theme to Keats at Bedhampton.

There is obvious similarity between several scenes and situations in *The Eve of St. Agnes* and those from the books mentioned above. The atmosphere of horror and enchantment in Madeline's castle reminds the reader of *The Mysteries of Udolpho ;* Porphyro, entering the household of Madeline's father, is like Romeo entering among the Capulets ; the mystic atmosphere of Madeline's room takes us to the fairy land of the *Arabian Nights* ; the banquet Porphyro arranges in her room will recall to the reader's mind the plentiful description of Milton's Paradise ; Porphyro's stratagem puts the reader in mind of Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo.* Lastly, the religious rites and the superstitions, which Madeline piously follows, may belong to Brand, Burton, or any chap-book dealing with old legends. Nothing is specially gained by saying that Keats borrowed from these sources,

which were as well open to all other writers. Only Keats could produce this marvellous poem, while others were still fumbling with their sources. The romantic atmosphere of the poem, its melodious flow of verse, its rich tapestry of word-pictures, and, lastly, the young ideal lovers are entirely Keats's creation. Nobody dare pluck the feather from his glorious cap. The young Keats must have ungrudgingly paid homage to his noble predecessors in the field of poetry : the splendid Spenser, the beloved Shakespeare, and the majestic Milton ; but to others he can afford to be supremely indifferent.

Atmosphere :

The outstanding charm of *St Agnes' Eve* is its romantic atmosphere. A picture of the Medieval Age, with its pomp and splendour, its ardent revelry, its sense of magic and mystery, its life of love and adventure, and its emphasis on religion, is vividly painted in this poem. The age of chivalry practically coincides with the medieval times. Its attributes are a keen sense of honour in matters of love and loyalty, a code of elaborate courtesies constituting a high, if somewhat artificial, refinement, and a lively sense of the beautiful. Here is a strange wonderful land where all men are handsome and all women beautiful. Prodigies of valour are performed in the cause of love and loyalty. No risk is considered too great to win the favour of the beloved or the praise of the master. Wounds received in battle or conflict are miraculously healed. Splendour and pageantry are the leading characteristics of this life of great perils and romantic ideals. Religion too plays a very prominent part in this world of chivalry. It is at once its strength and its source of inspiration. In moments of disappointment the knights and ladies can fall back on religion

and devote their energies to the cause of the church. Love, in this wonderful world, has been raised from a mere passion of the human heart to a higher moral plane. It becomes the love of the beautiful and the ideal. Whatever is truly beautiful is also supposed to be morally good. Edmund Spenser has immortalised this world of chivalry with all its noble attributes in his *Faerie Queene*. We have only to add that the style of the romantic literature is equally rich, elaborate, and decorative.

Keats has proved to be a worthy disciple of his worthy master. In his *St. Agnes' Eve* we start with the peaceful chapel on the large estates of the Baron. The Beadsman is telling his rosary, kneeling before the Virgin's picture, and is watched all round by the sculptured knights and ladies praying in dumb oratories. The soft tunes of music take us to the level chambers of the main mansion which are "ready with their pride". The carved angels, resting under the cornice, with wings put cross-wise on the breasts, lend a divine touch to the scene. Then bursts on our sight the ardent revelry with plume, tiara, and all rich array. Amongst them all, Madeline is dancing with vague regardless eyes, her mind being absorbed in her own dreams and religious rites. Along with Porphyro, who has come across the moors and who follows old Angela through an arched way, we enter the maiden's chamber "silken, hushed, and chaste". Madeline, the maid under the spell, is also absorbed in practising the religious rites and offering devout prayers. Then we behold the high casement, the triple arch, garlanded with carven imageries of fruits and flowers. The misty moon throws her warm gules on Madeline's fair breasts and turns her into a splendid angel. Porphyro grows faint— in fact, what else can any sympathetic and imaginative reader do in this fairy land? He must be overpowered by

the bewitching enchantment. The reader should note that the beauty and the enchantment of the picture are as much enhanced by concrete details as by suggestions thrown out here and there. *Cf.* " across the moors had come young Porphyro " ; he is hid " behind a broad hall-pillar " ; " He followed through a lowly arched way brushing the cobwebs with his lofty plume " ; " By one and one the bolts full easy slide, the chains lie silent on the foot-worn stones."

In this world Madeline is the reigning Queen of Beauty. Porphyro is the ideal knight-errant. The Baron and his bloated wassaillers, the dwarfish Hildebrand, and the sleeping dragons will give Porphyro the scope for his adventurous spirit if such an occasion arises. For the present he is full of love, his heart is on fire. Music, whether we listen to it in the dancing hall or whether it proceeds from Porphyro's lute in the holy chamber, is constantly aiding the witchery of moonlight. Religion in that old world is not rational—rousing in one a keen sense of duty and destiny in life. Old legends, traditions, superstitions are taken with the same sincerity and seriousness as articles of faith. Madeline is asleep in the lap of legends old, which influence her as any rational philosophy of life would inspire a modern woman.

Among the devices used to create this atmosphere, the most prominent is the principle of contrast. The bitter chill, which the Beadsman painfully suffers from, and which even the sculptured dead appear to feel, contrasts glaringly with the warmth and brilliance of the Baron's magnificent hall. The old Beadsman prays " for his soul's reprieve " and grieves " for sinners' sake ". Madeline, on the other hand, is praying devoutly in expectation of her happy dream. The snugness and comfort, the beauty and grandeur of Madeline's chamber stand in contrast to the vast moors that the lover has to traverse and the elfin storm from the fairy-

land, which they are ready to face. The old Beadsman, listening to his death-bell, and the palsy-twitched old Angela are ready to quit this world, while the beautiful Madeline and the daring Porphyro are about to enter it with all hope and enthusiasm.

Lastly, the whole atmosphere is surcharged with the spirit of beauty. No opportunity is lost by the poet to make the description glowing, rich, and fascinating. The gorgeous description of Madeline's chamber and of the sumptuous feast are instances in point. The appeal to the eye and the ear is unfailing throughout.

Action :

We have remarked in our study of *Isabella* that there is little action and variety of character in the poem. When we come to *St. Agnes' Eve*, the paucity of action and characterization is felt all the more on account of the overwhelming predominance of the romantic atmosphere. Except that Porphyro comes over the moors and that the lovers quit the castle secretly, there is nothing like positive action in the poem. The Beadsman is praying in the cold chapel, the Baron and his guests are carousing in the hall, Madeline is ali absorbed in performing the religious rites or in dreaming her happy vision, while Porphyro is closeted secretly in her chamber. Angela and the Beadsman are disabled by age from doing anything good to the young lovers. Isabella, though passive in the beginning, rises to the occasion and takes the initiative in bringing back the head of her lover to her home after she has understood the mystery of the murder. Madeline gets no opportunity to do anything spectacular. Possibly the same might be said about Porphyro. Except that he comes across the moors and flies away from the castle with his beloved, no romantic adventure worthy of a chivalrous knight is associated with his name. Could it be

that the short duration of the story—about twelve hours, from evening to dawn—afforded very little scope for spectacular events to take place?

Characters:

The want of action closely corresponds to a similar want of development of character. The first impressions, which Madeline and Porphyro create, are hardly changed towards the end. Nothing new is added on in the course of the story. To turn to Madeline, the heroine of the poem, round whom the whole story centres, she is represented as a sweet lady, a pure maiden, a devotee at the shrine of love. Her peerless beauty is her best recommendation, and Keats has lingered long in describing it. Here is a picture of the lovely maiden when she is praying:

"When Madeline, St. Agnes' charmed maid,
Rose, like a missioned spirit, unaware:
With silver taper's light and pious care."

Another picture when she is divinely robed in colours of the reflected moonlight:

"Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breasts,
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon:
Rose-bloom fell on her hands together pressed,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory like a saint."

And one more still, while she is preparing to retire:—

"...........her vespers done,
Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
Unclasps her warm jewels one by one;
Loosens her fragrant bodice; by degrees
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed."

Like a true Greek in spirit, Keats is never tired of describing physical excellence. This is youthful sensuous poetry with a vengeance.

Next to beauty comes the religion of Madeline's heart. She does not hesitate to believe implicitly in old legends and superstitions, and is only too willing to subject her beautiful body to any kind of penance and enchantment. All she wants is a vision of her lover, and she gets it—the lover of her dream and her lover on earth. Purity, sweetness, innocence and loveliness are the traits embodied in her character.

Porphyro : He comes in the story on account of Madeline. He is a famished pilgrim and eremite in the temple of Cupid. He comes across the moors with his heart on fire, and his one hope is

> "That he might gaze and worship all unseen ;
> Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss—".

Though burning with love, like a true knight of chivalry, he does not forget self-respect and fair play. He promises the doubting Angela :

> "If one of her soft ringlets I displace,
> Or look with ruffian passion in her face ;
> O, may I never find grace".

But love may bring him to the verge of ruin, which he will bravely and cheerfully face. He says—

> "Or I will even in a moment's place
> Awake with horrid shouts my foeman's ears
> And beard them, though they be more fanged than
> wolves and bears".

Perhaps his study of the Italian romances suggested to him a strange stratagem, which he proposed to Angela and which was ultimately accepted by her. Like a character in an Italian romance, he is closeted in Madeline's chamber, awaits his own opportunity, and awakes his "sweet dreamer" by playing on the lute a romantic ballad : a highly romantic situation for a romantic character! Love makes Porphyro

eloquent in his appeal to Madeline and resourceful in taking advantage of the elfin storm outside. "Aye, ages long ago, these lovers fled away into the storm"; but they are ever present in the imagination of the youthful reader.

The Beadsman: The old Beadsman, meagre, barefoot, and wan, is praying for his soul's reprieve and keeps awake 'for sinners' sake to grieve'. He feels that all the joys of his life are over and that he must be ready to face the inevitable hour. He is a type of the honest loyal servant in a Baron's household of medieval times.

It should be noted that the story begins with the prayers of the Beadsman and ends with his last thousand aves. Does the poet want to tone down the ardent revelry of the feast and the supreme enchantment of Madeline's life by the introduction of this solitary figure?

Angela: Old Angela, a poor, weak, palsy-stricken churchyard thing, is the maid-in-attendance of Madeline, and possibly her confidant, as she also enjoys the full trust of the young lover. After her doubts about Porphyro's rashness have been quieted, she fully sympathises with the yearning lover and helps him successfully in his dangerous stratagem and his wildest dreams. The purpose of her life is here practically fulfilled and she dies palsy-twitched.

Whether Porphyro was known only to Angela and through her reports about his virtues to her mistress, or he was known to the family and friends of the old Baron, has been, we believe, deliberately kept secret in the whole story. We take the first alternative to be consistent with the spirit of the story, and it helps to understand clearly the identification of the Porphyro of Madeline's dreams with the Porphyro of the earth, which is suggested in stanzas XXXV, XXXVII, and XXXVIII. Perhaps the mystery makes the poem all the more romantic to read.

ISABELLA;

OR

THE POT OF BASIL

I.

Fair Isabel, poor simple Isabel!
  Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love's eye!
They could not in the self-same mansion dwell
  Without some stir of heart, some malady;
They could not sit at meals but feel how well
  It soothed each to be the other by;
They could not, sure, beneath the same roof sleep
But to each other dream, and nightly weep.

II.

With every morn their love grew tenderer,
  With every eve deeper and tenderer still;
He might not in house, field, or garden stir,
  But her full shape would all his seeing fill;
And his continual voice was pleasanter
  To her, than noise of trees or hidden rill;
Her lute-string gave an echo of his name,
She spoilt her half-done broidery with the same.

III.

He knew whose gentle hand was at the latch
  Before the door had given her to his eyes;
And from her chamber-window he would catch
  Her beauty farther than the falcon spies;
And constant as her vespers would he watch,
  Because her face was turn'd to the same skies;
And with sick longing all the night outwear,
To hear her morning-step upon the stair.

IV.

A whole long month of May in this sad plight
  Made their cheeks paler by the break of June:
"To-morrow will I bow to my delight,
  To-morrow will I ask my lady's boon."—
"O may I never see another night,
  Lorenzo, if thy lips breathe not love's tune."—
So spake they to their pillows; but, alas,
Honeyless days and days did he let pass;

V.

Until sweet Isabella's untouch'd cheek
  Fell sick within the rose's just domain,
Fell thin as a young mother's, who doth seek
  By every lull to cool her infant's pain:
"How ill she is," said he, "I may not speak,
  And yet I will, and tell my love all plain:
If looks speak love-laws, I will drink her tears,
And at the least 'twill startle off her cares."

VI.

So said he one fair morning, and all day
His heart beat awfully against his side;
And to his heart he inwardly did pray
For power to speak; but still the ruddy tide
Stifled his voice, and puls'd resolve away—
Fever'd his high conceit of such a bride,
Yet brought him to the meekness of a child:
Alas! when passion is both meek and wild!

VII.

So once more he had wak'd and anguished
A dreary night of love and misery,
If Isabel's quick eye had not been wed
To every symbol on his forehead high;
She saw it waxing very pale and dead,
And straight all flush'd so, lisped tenderly,
"Lorenzo!"—here she ceas'd her timid quest,
But in her tone and look he read the rest.

VIII.

"O Isabella, I can half perceive
That I may speak my grief into thine ear;
If thou didst ever anything believe,
Believe how I love thee, believe how near
My soul is to its doom: I would not grieve
Thy hand by unwelcome pressing, would not fear
Thine eyes by gazing; but I cannot live
Another night, and not my passion shrive.

IX.

"Love! thou art leading me from wintry cold,
  Lady! thou leadest me to summer clime,
And I must taste the blossoms that unfold
  In its ripe warmth this gracious morning time."
So said, his erewhile timid lips grew bold,
  And poesied with hers in dewy rhyme:
Great bliss was with them, and great happiness
Grew, like a lusty flower in June's caress.

X.

Parting they seem'd to tread upon the air,
  Twin roses by the zephyr blown apart
Only to meet again more close, and share
  The inward fragrance of each other's heart.
She, to her chamber gone, a ditty fair
  Sang, of delicious love and honey'd dart;
He with light steps went up a western hill,
And bade the sun farewell, and joy'd his fill.

XI.

All close they met again, before the dusk
  Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil,
All close they met, all eves, before the dusk
  Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil,
Close in a bower of hyacinth and musk,
  Unknown of any, free from whispering tale.
Ah! better had it been for ever so,
Than idle ears should pleasure in their woe.

XII.

Were they unhappy then?—It cannot be—
Too many tears for lovers have they shed,
Too many sighs give we to them in fee,
Too much of pity after they are dead,
Too many doleful stories do we see,
Whose matter in bright gold were best be read;
Except in such a page where Theseus' spouse
Over the pathless waves towards him bows.

XIII.

But, for the general award of love,
The little sweet doth kill much bitterness;
Though Dido silent is in under-grove,
And Isabella's was a great distress,
Though young Lorenzo in warm Indian clove
Was not embalm'd, this truth is not the less—
Even bees, the little almsmen of spring-bowers,
Know there is richest juice in poison-flowers.

XIV.

With her two brothers this fair lady dwelt,
Enriched from ancestral merchandize,
And for them many a weary hand did swelt
In torched mines and noisy factories,
And many once proud quiver'd loins did melt
In blood from stinging whip;—with hollow eyes
Many all day in dazzling river stood,
To take the rich-or'd driftings of the flood.

XV.

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
And went all naked to the hungry shark;
For them his ears gush'd blood; for them in death
The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark
Lay full of darts; for them alone did seethe
A thousand men in troubles wide and dark:
Half-ignorant, they turn'd an easy wheel,
That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel.

XVI.

Why were they proud? Because their marble founts
Gush'd with more pride than do a wretch's tears?—
Why were they proud? Because fair orange-mounts
Were of more soft ascent than lazar stairs?—
Why were they proud? Because red-lin'd accounts
Were richer than the songs of Grecian years?—
Why were they proud? again we ask aloud,
Why in the name of Glory were they proud?

XVII.

Yet were these Florentines as self-retired
In hungry pride and gainful cowardice,
As two close Hebrews in that land inspired,
Pal'd in and vineyarded from beggar-spies;
The hawks of ship-mast forests—the untired
And pannier'd mules for ducats and old lies—
Quick cat's-paws on the generous stray-away,—
Great wits in Spanish, Tuscan, and Malay.

XVIII.

How was it these same ledger-men could spy
  Fair Isabella in her downy nest?
How could they find out in Lorenzo's eye
  A straying from his toil? Hot Egypt's pest
Into their vision covetous and sly!
  How could these money-bags see east and west?—
Yet so they did—and every dealer fair
Must see behind, as doth the hunted hare.

XIX.

O eloquent and famed Boccaccio!
  Of thee we now should ask forgiving boon,
And of thy spicy myrtles as they blow,
  And of thy roses amorous of the moon,
And of thy lilies, that do paler grow
  Now they can no more hear thy ghittern's tune,
For venturing syllables that ill beseem
The quiet glooms of such a piteous theme.

XX.

Grant thou a pardon here, and then the tale
  Shall move on soberly, as it is meet;
There is no other crime, no mad assail
  To make old prose in modern rhyme more sweet:
But it is done—succeed the verse or fail—
  To honour thee, and thy gone spirit greet;
To stead thee as a verse in English tongue,
An echo of thee in the north-wind sung.

XXI.

These brethren having found by many signs
What love Lorenzo for their sister had,
And how she lov'd him too, each unconfines
His bitter thoughts to other, well nigh mad
That he, the servant of their trade designs,
Should in their sister's love be blithe and glad,
When 'twas their plan to coax her by degrees
To some high noble and his olive-trees.

XXII.

And many a jealous conference had they,
And many times they bit their lips alone,
Before they fix'd upon a surest way
To make the youngster for his crime atone ;
And at the last, these men of cruel clay
Cut Mercy with a sharp knife to the bone ;
For they resolved in some forest dim
To kill Lorenzo, and there bury him.

XXIII.

So on a pleasant morning, as he leant
Into the sun-rise, o'er the balustrade
Of the garden-terrace, towards him they bent
Their footing through the dews ; and to him said,
"You seem there in the quiet of content.
Lorenzo, and we are most loth to invade
Calm speculation ; but if you are wise,
Bestride your steed while coid is in the skies.

XXIV.

To-day we purpose, aye, this hour we mount
  To spur three leagues towards the Apennine;
Come down, we pray thee, ere the hot sun count
  His dewy rosary on the eglantine."
Lorenzo, courteously, as he was wont,
  Bow'd a fair greeting to these serpents' whine;
And went in haste, to get in readiness,
With belt, and spur, and bracing huntsman's dress.

XXV.

And as he to the court-yard pass'd along,
  Each third step did he pause, and listen'd oft
If he could hear his lady's matin-song,
  Or the light whisper of her footstep soft;
And as he thus over his passion hung,
  He heard a laugh full musical aloft;
When, looking up, he saw her features bright
Smile through an in-door lattice, all delight.

XXVI.

"Love, Isabel!" said he, "I was in pain
  Lest I should miss to bid thee a good morrow:
Ah! what if I should lose thee, when so fain
  I am to stifle all the heavy sorrow
Of a poor three hours' absence? but we'll gain
  Out of the amorous dark what day doth borrow.
Good bye! I'll soon be back."—"Good bye!" said she:—
And as he went she chanted merrily.

XXVII.

So the two brothers and their murder'd man
  Rode past fair Florence, to where Arno's stream
Gurgles through straiten'd banks, and still doth fan
  Itself with dancing bulrush, and the bream
Keeps head against the freshets. Sick and wan
  The brothers' faces in the ford did seem,
Lorenzo's flush with love.—They pass'd the water
Into a forest quiet for the slaughter.

XXVIII.

There was Lorenzo slain and buried in,
  There in that forest did his great love cease ;
Ah ! when a soul doth thus its freedom win,
  It aches in loneliness—is ill at peace
As the break-covert blood-hounds of such sin :
  They dipp'd their swords in the water, and did tease
Their horses homeward, with convulsed spur,
Each richer by his being a murderer.

XXIX.

They told their sister how, with sudden speed,
  Lorenzo had ta'en ship for foreign lands,
Because of some great urgency and need
  In their affairs, requiring trusty hands.
Poor girl ! put on thy stifling widow's weed,
  And 'scape at once from Hope's accursed bands ;
To-day thou wilt not see him, nor to-morrow,
And the next day will be a day of sorrow.

XXX.

She weeps alone for pleasures not to be ;
  Sorely she wept until the night came on,
And then, in stead of love, O misery !
  She brooded o'er the luxury alone :
His image in the dusk she seem'd to see,
  And to the silence made a gentle moan,
Spreading her perfect arms upon the air,
And on her couch low murmuring " Where ? O where ? "

XXXI.

But Selfishness, Love's cousin, held not long
  Its fiery vigil in her single breast ;
She fretted for the golden hour, and hung
  Upon the time with feverish unrest—
Not long—for soon into her heart a throng
  Of higher occupants, a richer zest,
Came tragic ; passion not to be subdu'd,
And sorrow for her love in travels rude.

XXXII.

In the mid days of autumn, on their eves
  The breath of Winter comes from far away,
And the sick west continually bereaves
  Of some gold tinge, and plays a roundelay
Of death among the bushes and the leaves,
  To make all bare before he dares to stray
From his north cavern. So sweet Isabel
By gradual decay from beauty fell,

XXXIII.

Because Lorenzo came not. Oftentimes
  She ask'd her brothers, with an eye all pale,
Striving to be itself, what dungeon climes
  Could keep him off so long? They spake a tale
Time after time, to quiet her. Their crimes
  Came on them, like a smoke from Hinnom's vale;
And every night in dreams they groan'd aloud,
To see their sister in her snowy shroud.

XXXIV.

And she had died in drowsy ignorance,
  But for a thing more deadly dark than all;
It came like a fierce potion, drunk by chance,
  Which saves a sick man from the feather'd pall
For some few grasping moments; like a lance,
  Waking an Indian from his cloudy hall
With cruel pierce, and bringing him again
Sense of the gnawing fire at heart and brain.

XXXV.

It was a vision.—In the drowsy gloom,
  The dull of midnight, at her couch's foot
Lorenzo stood, and wept: the forest tomb
  Had marr'd his glossy hair which once could shoot
Lustre into the sun, and put cold doom
  Upon his lips, and taken the soft lute
From his lorn voice, and past his loamed ears
Had made a miry channel for his tears.

XXXVI.

Strange sound it was, when the pale shadow spake;
For there was striving, in its piteous tongue,
To speak as when on earth it was awake,
And Isabella on its music hung:
Languor there was in it, and tremulous shake,
As in a palsied Druid's harp unstrung;
And through it moan'd a ghostly under-song,
Like hoarse night-gusts sepulchral briars among.

XXXVII.

Its eyes, though wild, were still all dewy bright
With love, and kept all phantom fear aloof
From the poor girl by magic of their light,
The while it did unthread the horrid woof
Of the late darken'd time,—the murderous spite
Of pride and avarice,—the dark pine roof
In the forest,—and the sodden turfed dell,
Where, without any word, from stabs he fell.

XXXVIII.

Saying moreover, "Isabel, my sweet!
Red whortle-berries droop above my head,
And a large flint-stone weighs upon my feet;
Around me beeches and high chestnuts shed
Their leaves and prickly nuts; a sheep-fold bleat
Comes from beyond the river to my bed:
Go, shed one tear upon my heather-bloom,
And it shall comfort me within the tomb.

XXXIX.

I am a shadow now, alas! alas!
  Upon the skirts of human nature dwelling
Alone: I chant alone the holy mass,
  While little sounds of life are round me kneeling,
And glossy bees at noon do fieldward pass,
  And many a chapel bell the hour is telling,
Paining me through: those sounds grow strange to me,
And thou art distant in Humanity.

XL.

I know what was, I feel full well what is,
  And I should rage, if spirits could go mad;
Though I forget the taste of earthly bliss,
  That paleness warms my grave, as though I had
A seraph chosen from the bright abyss
  To be my spouse: thy paleness makes me glad;
Thy beauty grows upon me, and I feel
A greater love through all my essence steal."

XLI.

The Spirit mourn'd "Adieu!"—dissolv'd and left
  The atom darkness in a slow turmoil;
As when of healthful midnight sleep bereft,
  Thinking on rugged hours and fruitless toil,
We put our eyes into a pillowy cleft,
  And see the spangly gloom froth up and boil:
It made sad Isabella's eyelids ache,
And in the dawn she started up awake;

XLII.

"Ha! ha!" said she, "I knew not this hard life,
  I thought the worst was simple misery;
I thought some Fate with pleasure or with strife
  Portion'd us—happy days, or else to die;
But there is crime—a brother's bloody knife!
  Sweet Spirit, thou hast school'd my infancy:
I'll visit thee for this, and kiss thine eyes,
And greet thee morn and even in the skies."

XLIII.

When the full morning came, she had devised
  How she might secret to the forest hie;
How she might find the clay, so dearly prized,
  And sing to it one latest lullaby;
How her short absence might be unsurmised,
  While she the inmost of the dream would try.
Resolv'd, she took with her an aged nurse,
And went into that dismal forest-hearse.

XLIV.

See, as they creep along the river side,
  How she doth whisper to that aged dame,
And, after looking round the champaign wide,
  Shows her a knife.—"What feverous hectic flame
Burns in thee, child?—What good can thee betide,
  That thou should'st smile again?"—The evening came.
And they had found Lorenzo's earthly bed;
The flint was there, the berries at his head.

XLV.

Who hath not loiter'd in a green church-yard,
And let his spirit, like a demon-mole,
Work through the clayey soil and gravel hard,
To see scull, coffin'd bones, and funeral stole;
Pitying each form that hungry Death hath marr'd,
And filling it once more with human soul?
Ah! this is holiday to what was felt
When Isabella by Lorenzo knelt.

XLVI

She gaz'd into the fresh-thrown mould, as though
One glance did fully all its secrets tell;
Clearly she saw, as other eyes would know
Pale limbs at bottom of a crystal well;
Upon the murderous spot she seem'd to grow,
Like to a native lily of the dell:
Then with her knife, all sudden, she began
To dig more fervently than misers can.

XLVII.

Soon she turn'd up a soiled glove, whereon
Her silk had play'd in purple phantasies,
She kiss'd it with a lip more chill than stone,
And put it in her bosom, where it dries
And freezes utterly unto the bone
Those dainties made to still an infant's cries:
Then 'gan she work again; nor stay'd her care,
But to throw back at times her veiling hair.

XLVIII.

That old nurse stood beside her wondering,
  Until her heart felt pity to the core
At sight of such a dismal labouring,
  And so she kneeled, with her locks of hoar,
And put her lean hands to the horrid thing :
  Three hours they labour'd at this travail sore ;
At last they felt the kernel of the grave,
And Isabella did not stamp and rave.

XLIX.

Ah ! wherefore all this wormy circumstance ?
  Why linger at the yawning tomb so long ?
O for the gentleness of old Romance,
  The simple plaining of a minstrel's song !
Fair reader, at the old tale take a glance,
  For here, in truth, it doth not well belong
To speak :—O turn thee to the very tale,
And taste the music of that vision pale.

L.

With duller steel than the Perséan sword
  They cut away no formless monster's head,
But one, whose gentleness did well accord
  With death, as life. The ancient harps have said,
Love never dies, but lives, immortal Lord :
  If love impersonate was ever dead,
Pale Isabella kiss'd it, and low moan'd.
'Twas love ; cold,—dead indeed, but not dethron'd.

LI.

In anxious secrecy they took it home,
And then the prize was all for Isabel :
She calm'd its wild hair with a golden comb,
And all around each eye's sepulchral cell
Pointed each fringed lash ; the smeared loam
With tears, as chilly as a dripping well,
She drench'd away :—and still she comb'd, and kept
Sighing all day—and still she kiss'd, and wept.

LII.

Then in a silken scarf,—sweet with the dews
Of precious flowers pluck'd in Araby,
And divine liquids come with odorous ooze
Through the cold serpent-pipe refreshfully,—
She wrapp'd it up ; and for its tomb did choose
A garden-pot, wherein she laid it by,
And cover'd it with mould, and o'er it set
Sweet Basil, which her tears kept ever wet.

LIII.

And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
And she forgot the blue above the trees,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze ;
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
And the new morn she saw not : but in peace
Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,
And moisten'd it with tears unto the core.

LIV.

And so she ever fed it with thin tears,
  Whence thick, and green, and beautiful it grew,
So that it smelt more balmy than its peers
  Of Basil-tufts in Florence; for it drew
Nurture besides, and life, from human fears,
  From the fast mouldering head there shut from view:
So that the jewel, safely casketed,
Came forth, and in perfumed leafits spread.

LV.

O Melancholy, linger here awhile!
  O Music, Music, breathe despondingly!
O Echo, Echo, from some sombre isle,
  Unknown, Lethean, sigh to us—O sigh!
Spirits in grief, lift up your heads, and smile;
  Lift up your heads, sweet Spirits, heavily,
And make a pale light in your cypress glooms,
Tinting with silver wan your marble tombs.

LVI.

Moan hither, all ye syllables of woe,
  From the deep throat of sad Melpomene!
Through bronzed lyre in tragic order go,
  And touch the strings into a mystery;
Sound mournfully upon the winds and low;
  For simple Isabel is soon to be
Among the dead: She withers, like a palm
Cut by an Indian for its juicy balm.

LVII.

O leave the palm to wither by itself ;
  Let not quick Winter chill its dying hour !—
It may not be—those Baälites of pelf,
  Her brethren, noted the continual shower
From her dead eyes ; and many a curious elf,
  Among her kindred, wonder'd that such dower
Of youth and beauty should be thrown aside
By one mark'd out to be a Noble's bride.

LVIII.

And, furthermore, her brethren wonder'd much
  Why she sat drooping by the Basil green,
And why it flourish'd, as by magic touch ;
  Greatly they wonder'd what the thing might mean :
They could not surely give belief, that such
  A very nothing would have power to wean
Her from her own fair youth, and pleasures gay,
And even remembrance of her love's delay.

LIX.

Therefore they watch'd a time when they might sift
  This hidden whim ; and long they watch'd in vain ;
For seldom did she go to chapel-shrift,
  And seldom felt she any hunger-pain ;
And when she left, she hurried back, as swift
  As bird on wing to breast its eggs again ;
And, patient as a hen-bird, sat her there
Beside her Basil, weeping through her hair.

LX.

Yet they contriv'd to steal the Basil-pot,
And to examine it in secret place:
The thing was vile with green and livid spot,
And yet they knew it was Lorenzo's face:
The guerdon of their murder they had got,
And so left Florence in a moment's space,
Never to turn again.—Away they went,
With blood upon their heads, to banishment.

LXI.

O Melancholy, turn thine eyes away!
O Music, Music, breathe despondingly!
O Echo, Echo, on some other day,
From isles Lethean, sigh to us—O sigh!
Spirits of grief, sing not your "Well-a-way!"
For Isabel, sweet Isabel, will die;
Will die a death too lone and incomplete,
Now they have ta'en away her Basil sweet.

LXII.

Piteous she look'd on dead and senseless things,
Asking for her lost Basil amorously;
And with melodious chuckle in the strings
Of her lorn voice, she oftentimes would cry
After the Pilgrim in his wanderings,
To ask him where her Basil was; and why
'Twas hid from her: "For cruel 'tis," said she,
"To steal my Basil-pot away from me."

LXIII.

And so she pin'd and so she died forlorn,
  Imploring for her Basil to the last.
No heart was there in Florence but did mourn
  In pity of her love, so overcast.
And a sad ditty of this story born
  From mouth to mouth through all the country pass'd :
Still is the burthen sung—"O cruelty,
To steal my Basil-pot away from me!"

THE EVE OF ST. AGNES

I.

St. Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censor old,
Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

II.

His prayer he saith, this patient, holy man;
Then takes his lamp, and riseth from his knees,
And back returneth, meagre, barefoot, wan,
Along the chapel aisle by slow degrees:
The sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze,
Emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails:
Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries,
He passeth by; and his weak spirit fails
To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails.

III.

Northward he turneth through a little door,
And scarce three steps, ere Music's golden tongue
Flatter'd to tears this aged man and poor;
But no—already had his death-bell rung:
The joys of all his life were said and sung:
His was harsh penance on St. Agnes' Eve:
Another way he went, and soon among
Rough ashes sat he for his soul's reprieve,
And all night kept awake, for sinners' sake to grieve.

IV.

That ancient Beadsman heard the prelude soft;
And so it chanc'd, for many a door was wide,
From hurry to and fro. Soon, up aloft,
The silver, snarling trumpets 'gan to chide:
The level chambers, ready with their pride,
Were glowing to receive a thousand guests:
The carved angels, ever eager-ey'd,
Star'd, where upon their heads the cornice rests,
With hair blown back, and wings put cross-wise on their
breasts.

V.

At length burst in the argent revelry,
With plume, tiara, and all rich array,
Numerous as shadows haunting faerily
The brain, new stuff'd, in youth, with triumphs gay
Of old romance. These let us wish away,

And turn, sole-thoughted, to one Lady there,
Whose heart had brooded, all that wintry day,
On love, and wing'd St. Agnes' saintly care,
As she had heard old dames full many times declare.

VI.

They told her how, upon St. Agnes' Eve,
Young virgins might have visions of delight,
And soft adorings from their loves receive
Upon the honey'd middle of the night,
If ceremonies due they did aright;
As, supperless to bed they must retire,
And couch supine their beauties, lily white;
Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require
Of heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire.

VII.

Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline:
The music, yearning like a God in pain,
She scarcely heard: her maiden eyes divine,
Fix'd on the floor, saw many a sweeping train
Pass by—she heeded not at all: in vain
Came many a tiptoe, amorous cavalier,
And back retir'd; not cool'd by high disdain,
But she saw not: her heart was otherwhere:
She sigh'd for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of the year.

VIII.

She danc'd along with vague, regardless eyes,
Anxious her lips, her breathing quick and short:

The hallow'd hour was near at hand : she sighs
Amid the timbrels, and the throng'd resort
Of whisperers in anger, or in sport ;
'Mid looks of love, defiance, hate, and scorn,
Hoodwink'd with faery fancy ; all amort,
Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn,
And all the bliss to be before to-morrow morn.

IX.

So, purposing each moment to retire,
She linger'd still. Meantime, across the moors,
Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire
For Madeline. Beside the portal doors,
Buttress'd from moonlight, stands he, and implores
All saints to give him sight of Madeline,
But for one moment in the tedious hours,
That he might gaze and worship all unseen ;
Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss—in sooth such things have been.

X.

He ventures in : let no buzz'd whisper tell :
All eyes be muffled, or a hundred swords
Will storm his heart, Love's fev'rous citadel :
For him, those chambers held barbarian hordes,
Hyena foemen, and hot-blooded lords,
Whose very dogs would execrations howl
Against his lineage : not one breast affords
Him any mercy, in that mansion foul,
Save one old beldame, weak in body and in soul.

XI.

Ah, happy chance! the aged creature came,
Shuffling along with ivory-headed wand,
To where he stood, hid from the torch's flame,
Behind a broad hall-pillar, far beyond
The sound of merriment and chorus bland:
He startled her; but soon she knew his face,
And grasp'd his fingers in her palsied hand,
Saying, "Mercy, Porphyro! hie thee from this place;
They are all here to-night, the whole blood-thirsty race!

XII.

Get hence! get hence! there's dwarfish Hildebrand;
He had a fever late, and in the fit
He cursed thee and thine, both house and land:
Then there's that old Lord Maurice, not a whit
More tame for his gray hairs—Alas me! flit!
Flit like a ghost away."—"Ah, Gossip dear,
We're safe enough; here in this arm-chair sit,
And tell me how"—"Good Saints! not here, not here:
Follow me, child, or else these stones will be thy bier."

XIII.

He follow'd through a lowly arched way,
Brushing the cobwebs with his lofty plume,
And as she mutter'd "Well-a—well-a-day!"
He found him in a little moonlight room,
Pale, lattic'd, chill, and silent as a tomb.
"Now tell me where is Madeline," said he,

"O tell me, Angela, by the holy loom
Which none but secret sisterhood may see,
When they St. Agnes' wool are weaving piously."

XIV.

"St. Agnes! Ah! it is St. Agnes' Eve—
Yet men will murder upon holy days:
Thou must hold water in a witch's sieve,
And be liege-lord of all the Elves and Fays,
To venture so: it fills me with amaze
To see thee, Porphyro!—St. Agnes' Eve!
God's help! my lady fair the conjuror plays
This very night: good angels her deceive!
But let me laugh awhile, I've mickle time to grieve."

XV.

Feebly she laugheth in the languid moon,
While Porphyro upon her face doth look,
Like puzzled urchin on an aged crone
Who keepeth clos'd a wondrous riddle-book,
As spectacled she sits in chimney nook.
But soon his eyes grew brilliant, when she told
His lady's purpose; and he scarce could brook
Tears, at the thought of those enchantments cold,
And Madeline asleep in lap of legends old.

XVI.

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,
Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart

Made purple riot : then doth he propose
A stratagem, that makes the beldame start :
"A cruel man and impious thou art :
Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream
Alone with her good angels, far apart
From wicked men like thee. Go, go !—I deem
Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem."

XVII.

"I will not harm her, by all saints I swear,"
Quoth Porphyro : "O may I ne'er find grace
When my weak voice shall whisper its last prayer,
If one of her soft ringlets I displace,
Or look with ruffian passion in her face :
Good Angela, believe me by these tears ;
Or I will, even in a moment's space,
Awake, with horrid shout, my foemen's ears,
And beard them, though they be more fang'd than wolves and bears."

XVIII.

"Ah ! why wilt thou affright a feeble soul ?
A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing,
Whose passing-bell may ere the midnight toll ;
Whose prayers for thee, each morn and evening,
Were never miss'd."—Thus plaining, doth she bring
A gentler speech from burning Porphyro ;
So woeful, and of such deep sorrowing,
That Angela gives promise she will do
Whatever he shall wish, betide her weal or woe.

XIX.

Which was, to lead him, in close secrecy,
Even to Madeline's chamber, and there hide
Him in a closet, of such privacy
That he might see her beauty unespy'd,
And win perhaps that night a peerless bride,
While legion'd faeries pac'd the coverlet,
And pale enchantment held her sleepy-ey'd.
Never on such a night have lovers met,
Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt.

XX.

"It shall be as thou wishest," said the Dame:
"All cates and dainties shall be stored there
Quickly on this feast-night: by the tambour frame
Her own lute thou wilt see: no time to spare,
For I am slow and feeble, and scarce dare
On such a catering trust my dizzy head.
Wait here, my child, with patience; kneel in prayer
The while: Ah! thou must needs the lady wed,
Or may I never leave my grave among the dead."

XXI.

So saying, she hobbled off with busy fear.
The lover's endless minutes slowly passed;
The dame return'd, and whisper'd in his ear
To follow her; with aged eyes aghast
From fright of dim espial. Safe at last,
Through many a dusky gallery, they gain

The maiden's chamber, silken, hush'd, and chaste ;
Where Porphyro took covert, pleas'd amain.
His poor guide hurried back with agues in her brain.

XXII.

Her falt'ring hand upon the balustrade,
Old Angela was feeling for the stair,
When Madeline, St. Agnes' charmed maid,
Rose, like a mission'd spirit, unaware :
With silver taper's light, and pious care,
She turn'd, and down the aged gossip led
To a safe level matting. Now prepare,
Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed ;
She comes, she comes again, like ring dove fray'd and fled.

XXIII.

Out went the taper as she hurried in ;
Its little smoke, in pallied moonshine, died :
She clos'd the door, she panted, all akin
To spirits of the air, and visions wide :
No uttered syllable, or, woe betide !
But to her heart, her heart was voluble,
Paining with eloquence her balmy side ;
As though a tongueless nightingale should swell
Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell.

XXIV.

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imag'ries

Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

XXV.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint:
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven:—Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

XXVI.

Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,
Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;
Loosens her fragrant boddice; by degrees
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,
Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.

XXVII.

Soon, trembling in her soft and chilly nest,
In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex'd she lay,
Until the poppied warmth of sleep oppress'd
Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away;
Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day;
Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain;
Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.

XXVIII.

Stol'n to this paradise, and so entranced,
Porphyro gaz'd upon her empty dress,
And listen'd to her breathing, if it chanced
To wake into a slumberous tenderness;
Which when he heard, that minute did he bless,
And breath'd himself: then from the closet crept,
Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness,
And over the hush'd carpet, silent, stept,
And 'tween the curtains peep'd, where, lo!—how fast she slept.

XXIX.

Then by the bed-side, where the faded moon
Made a dim, silver twilight, soft he set
A table, and, half anguish'd, threw thereon
A cloth of woven crimson, gold, and jet:—
O for some drowsy Morphean amulet!
The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,

The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarinet,
Affray his ears, though but in dying tone :—
The hall door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.

XXX.

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanched linen, smooth, and lavender'd,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd ;
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon ;
Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
From Fez ; and spiced dainties, every one,
From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.

XXXI.

These delicates he heap'd with glowing hand
On golden dishes and in baskets bright
Of wreathed silver : sumptuous they stand
In the retired quiet of the night,
Filling the chilly room with perfume light.—
"And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake !
Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite :
Open thine eyes, for meek St. Agnes' sake,
Or I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache."

XXXII.

Thus whispering, his warm, unnerved arm
Sank in her pillow. Shaded was her dream
By the dusk curtains :—'twas a midnight charm

Impossible to melt as iced stream :
The lustrous salvers in the moonlight gleam ;
Broad golden fringe upon the carpet lies :
It seem'd he never, never could redeem
From such a steadfast spell his lady's eyes ;
So mus'd awhile, entoil'd in woofed phantasies.

XXXIII.

Awakening up, he took her hollow lute,—
Tumultuous,—and, in chords that tenderest be,
He play'd an ancient ditty, long since mute,
In Provence call'd, " La belle dame sans mercy : "
Close to her ear touching the melody ;—
Wherewith disturb'd, she utter'd a soft moan :
He ceas'd—she panted quick—and suddenly
Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone :
Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone.

XXXIV.

Her eyes were open, but she still beheld,
Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep :
There was a painful change, that nigh expell'd
The blisses of her dream so pure and deep
At which fair Madeline began to weep,
And moan forth witless words with many a sigh ;
While still her gaze on Porphyro would keep ;
Who knelt, with joined hands and piteous eye,
Fearing to move or speak, she look'd so dreamingly.

XXXV.

" Ah, Porphyro ! " said she, " but even now
Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear,

Made tuneable with every sweetest vow;
And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear:
How chang'd thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear!
Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,
Those looks immortal, those complainings dear!
Oh leave me not in this eternal woe,
For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go."

XXXVI.

Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far
At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star
Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;
Into her dream he melted, as the rose
Blendeth its odour with the violet,—
Solution sweet: meantime the frost-wind blows
Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet
Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set.

XXXVII.

'Tis dark: quick pattereth the flaw-blown sleet:
"This is no dream, my bride, my Madeline!"
'Tis dark: the iced gusts still rave and beat:
"No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine!
Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine.—
Cruel! what traitor could thee hither bring?
I curse not, for my heart is lost in thine,
Though thou forsakest a deceived thing;—
A dove forlorn and lost with sick unpruned wing."

XXXVIII.

"My Madeline! sweet dreamer! lovely bride!
Say, may I be for aye thy vassal blest?
Thy beauty's shield, heart-shap'd and vermeil dy'd?
Ah, silver shrine, here will I take my rest
After so many hours of toil and quest,
A famish'd pilgrim,—sav'd by miracle.
Though I have found, I will not rob thy nest
Saving of thy sweet self; if thou think'st well
To trust, fair Madeline, to no rude infidel.

XXXIX.

Hark! 'tis an elfin-storm from faery land,
Of haggard seeming, but a boon indeed:
Arise—arise! the morning is at hand;—
The bloated wassaillers will never heed:—
Let us away, my love, with happy speed;
There are no ears to hear, or eyes to see,—
Drown'd all in Rhenish and the sleepy mead:
Awake! arise! my love, and fearless be,
For o'er the southern moors I have a home for thee."

XL.

She hurried at his words, beset with fears,
For there were sleeping dragons all around,
At glaring watch, perhaps, with ready spears—
Down the wide stairs a darkling way they found.—
In all the house was heard no human sound.
A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door;

The arras, rich with horsemen, hawk, and hound,
Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar;
And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor.

XLI.

They glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall;
Like phantoms, to the iron porch, they glide;
Where lay the Porter, in uneasy sprawl,
With a huge empty flaggon by his side:
The wakeful bloodhound rose, and shook his hide,
But his sagacious eye an inmate owns:
By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide:—
The chains lie silent on the footworn stones;—
The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groans.

XLII.

And they are gone: aye, ages long ago
These lovers fled away into the storm.
That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,
And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form
Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm,
Were long be-nightmar'd. Angela the old
Died palsy-twitch'd, with meagre face deform;
The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,
For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold.

Notes

ISABELLA
OR
THE POT OF BASIL.

Both the titles of the poem are significant—the first one, 'Isabella', comes from the heroine herself; the Pot of Basil plays a very prominent part in Isabella's life after she has lost her lover; thus the second title suggests important incidents in the life of the heroine.

Isabel: Definitely a more musical name for the heroine than Boccaccio's Lisabetta. Even names have their charm and associations, and it requires no uncommon skill to choose them correctly. Cf.

> 'Words, like fine flowers, have their colours too
> *   *   *   *   *   *
> And who of her Rosamund or Rosalind
> Can part the rosy-petall'd syllables?
> *For women's names keep murmuring like the wind*
> The hidden things that none for ever tells.'
>
> —*Ernest Rhys.*

Note that the accent in 'Isabella' falls on the third syllable 'el', while, in 'Isabel' it falls on the first, 'Is'.

1. *Fair .... Isabel*!: Three simple words, viz. fair, poor, and simple, sum up the tragedy of the heroine's life. She was

beautiful, she was innocent; but beauty and innocence alone could not arm her against the evils of life. A dramatic beginning, indeed!

2. *Lorenzo*: Reminds us of Shakespeare's Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice*, particularly associated with the famous moonlight scene.

2. *A young palmer in Love's eye!*: The awkwardness of the expression only reveals want of experience on the part of the poet in handling his art. The word 'palmer' stands in need of some word like 'shrine'. Obviously the meaning is, Lorenzo is Love's pilgrim, dedicating his youth and energy to the cause of Love.

3. *The self-same mansion*: An echo of the French version of the story.

4. *Malady*: Not quite a good rhyme for 'eye' and 'by'.

The very first stanza of the poem takes the reader to the heart of the story, and he finds the lovers deeply attached to each other.

12. *Seeing*: Mental vision, the eye of his imagination.

14. *Noise of trees*: In no way a happy expression; nothing but the use of 'noise' by Coleridge has induced Keats to fall into this trap. e.g.

> "A *noise* like of a hidden brook
> That singeth of a quiet tune".
>
> —Coleridge.

15. *Her lute-strings etc.*: When she played upon her lute, she heard Lorenzo's name in the notes of it.

16. *She spoilt ....the same*: Isabella's thoughts and feelings were so much concentrated on her lover that her designs of embroidery were often marred by Lorenzo's name being worked into the cloth. The original design was spoilt owing to her absorption in her lover and his name being worked into it.

17. *He knew .... his eyes*: Love quickens sense perception, and instincts seem to be more powerful than senses in matters of love.

19. *Chamber .... window*: Highly suggestive of the romantic atmosphere.

21. *And constant .... watch* : Prayers are often a source of strength to the lovers. Isabella never failed to offer her prayers in the evening, nor did Lorenzo, to get a glimpse of his beloved.

21. *Vespers* : Evening prayers.

25. *Sad plight* : Suggests the elements of the tragedy that was to follow.

27-30 : A remarkable coincidence—an instance of telepathy. The lovers are thinking the same thoughts and experiencing the same feelings.

28. *My lady's boon* : Gift or favour of my beloved.

31. *Pillows* : The traditional confidants of lovers.

32. *Honeyless .... pass* : One of the most beautiful and memorable lines in the poem. The long vowel-sounds and the sibilants effectively convey the long tedious time the lovers have to pass.

32. *Honeyless* : Joyless ; unhappy.

34. *The rose's just domain* : The place where the rose ought to bloom i.e. the cheeks which ought to be naturally rosy in the very flush of youth.

34. *Rose's just domain* : Rather too elaborate an expression for the simple idea that her rosy cheeks turned pale.

37. *I may not speak* : Lorenzo is fully conscious of his status in his master's household, and feels sorry that he is denied the pleasure of inquiring after the health of his mistress.

38. *And yet I will* : Now it is the lover in Lorenzo who is prepared to take the risk.

39. *If looks .... love-laws* : The plain meaning is 'if I can read her love in her looks'.

As the reader proceeds with the poem, he finds defective expressions accumulating. They only reveal the immature powers of the poet.

44. *Ruddy tide* i.e. blood throbbing fiercely in his veins.

44. *The ruddy tide .... voice* : The excitement ran high in his heart and he became tongue tied.

45. *Pulsed .... away* : On account of intense excitement, his resolution to declare his love to his beloved could not be carried out. The reader has to find out a suitable meaning for the word 'pulse', used as a verb. Orlando, in *As You Like It*,

finds himself similarly tongue-tied in his first meeting with Rosalind (Act I. ii).

46. *Fevered .... bride* : Excited his mind to such a pitch that he indulged in the idea of winning Isabella as his bride—one far superior to him in beauty as well as in social position.

49. *Anguished* : passed in anguish.

50-51. *If .... forehead high* : If Isabel had not correctly read every symptom of love writ large in his face. The face is generally an index to the mind. The expression used by the poet is rather crude. Keats had not, at this stage, acquired the clarity and directness of expression of his Greek models.

51. *Had not been wed to every symbol* : Had not been able to read every sign.

54. *Straight .... flushed* : The very thought that Lorenzo was suffering on *her* account sends a flush of joy to her face. The lover is often perverse, but kind too.

55. *Lorenzo* ! : This single word reveals the whole wealth of her heart. It is her 'open sesame'—the magic pass-word at which the treasures of her heart are unlocked.

60-61. *How near .... doom* : Death or utter ruin is the only alternative if his love is not requitted by her.

62. *Fear* : Frighten—a quite unusual use.

64. *Shrive* : Confess.

61-64. We can note here the keen sense of honour that Lorenzo possesses. Even self-interest will not blind him to his chivalrous instincts.

65-69. Images are heaped in these lines, for intensity of feeling often results in eloquence.

70. *And poesied .... rhyme* : This is an extravagant fancy expressed in extravagant language. It means—He pressed his lips on to hers. He kissed her.

72. *Like a lusty flower etc* : Like a full-blown flower nourished by the warmth of summer. The beautiful simile aptly describes the supreme happiness of the lovers.

73-76 : A typical Keatsean image in its full sensuousness.

77-78 : *Ditty fair sang* : Her beautiful song is a clear index to her perfect happiness.

78. *Honey'd dart* : The arrows of Cupid are sweet to the lovers. Even the pangs of love bring happiness to them.

80. *And bade the sun .... fill* : A wonderful finish to a wonderful situation. We always read our feelings in nature. The sun-set, a common thing in Nature, was uncommonly attractive to Lorenzo that day.

81-82. *Before the dusk ....veil* : It was still dusk, and the stars were hidden by the darkness of evening. The pleasing shades of evening form as it were a veil which hides the stars from view.

85. *Hyacinth* : A bell-shaped blue-purple flower. Keats is particularly fond of this flower. Homer also has often mentioned it in his poetry.

86. *Whispering tale* : Public gossip.

87-88. *Ah ! .... woe* : The reader will entirely agree with the poet that people should mind their own business.

91. *To give in fee* : To give as compensation for their sufferings. The usual phrase "to hold in fee" means to hold in absolute possession.

89-94 : This hopeful mood is a typical characteristic of youthful poetry. Keats wants to sing of the glory and triumph of love instead of its tragic aspects.

93-94. *Too many doleful stories .... be read* : Generally poets make the stories of love too sad or melancholy. The subject-matter of these stories might have been better set forth in brilliant, joyful poems.

95-96. *Except .... bows* : These lines refer to the tragic love of Ariadne, daughter of Minos, for Theseus, son of Poseidon ; or, according to a later legend, of Aegeus, King of Athens. With the help of Ariadne (*Theseus' spouse*), Theseus achieved many great feats at Athens—among others, the destruction of the Minotaur—a Cretan Monster. He carried off Ariadne, but subsequently deserted her on the island of Naxos (*over the pathless waves*).

This tragic story is an exception to the general statement made in the first six lines.

97-98 : The poet is fully conscious of the exceptions to his statements made above—of real tragedies of love : but he wants

to assert that, talking of love in general, the happiness lovers derive from love certainly compensates for all their sufferings.

99. *Though .... grove* : Dido, the hapless queen of Carthage, fell desperately in love with Aeneas, a Trojan Hero, when he was ship-wrecked on the shores of North Africa. Aeneas fully responded to her love, but in obedience to the behest of the gods deserted Dido, and went to the shores of Italy to found the Roman Empire. In bitter disappointment Dido stabbed herself to death. When after his death Aeneas met Dido in Hades and offered apologies for his treachery, she refused to accept any explanation from him.

99. *Silent is in under-grove* : Dido continued to suffer stoically. This, according to Keats, is another real tragedy of love.

103. *The little almsmen of spring-bowers* : The bees are called alms-men, because they receive alms (i.e. honey) from flowers which bloom in spring. This is certainly one of the memorable phrases in the poem.

105-112. The reader should note that from this stanza the retrospective narration begins. His sympathies are already enlisted on side of Isabella and Lorenzo, who are threatened with distress in their love. He is anxious to know how they came to develop this intimacy between themselves, and what stood in the way of its fulfilment.

107. *Swelt* : Swoon, faint.

108. *Torched mines* : Deep mines which had to be illuminated by torches.

109-110. *And many .... whip* : Negro slaves, who normally lived nomadic lives, hunting in the forest and enjoying their freedom (*proud-quivered*), were yoked to work by the rich brothers in the factories. They were mercilessly whipped for slackness.

109. *Quivered* : Furnished with bows and quivers of arrows.

111. *Dazzling rivers* : Rivers particularly in the tropical regions.

112. *The rich-or'd drifting* : Precious deposits left behind by the over-flow of waters ; grains of gold mixed with the sand of the rivers.

113. *The Ceylon diver* : The reference is to the pearl-fishery of Ceylon.

115. *His ears gushed blood* : The divers were attacked by sharks, and hence blood gushed from their wounds. Another possible meaning is his ears bled on account of the water on his ears.

116. *Seal* : An animal belonging to the polar regions, killed for its oil, skin and fur.

119. *Half-ignorant* : Not caring for the unparalleled sufferings, which they inflicted upon their workmen by means of the instruments of torture.

105-120. These two Stanzas work out in detail a picture of the cruel rich brothers of Isabel, serving thereby a good background for the essentially tender, loving nature of their sister. Keats in these stanzas fully works out the principle of contrast.

121. *Why were they proud?* : The answer is that they were proud of their immense wealth and all the grandeur associated with it.

One wonders whether the rhetorical questions are absolutely necessary in the smooth flow of the narrative. Perhaps they would be more appropriate in the mouth of an orator, appealing to an emotional audience.

121. *Marble founts* : Suggests a big palatial building surrounded by a large, beautiful garden.

123. *Orange-mounts* : Staircases of beautiful orange colour ; the phrase may also mean little hillocks studded with orange trees.

124. *Lazar stairs* : The steps on which beggars sat to beg for alms. *Lazar* comes from *Lazarus*—St. Luke,—Chap. XII.

125. *Red-lined accounts* : This expression vividly describes their neat account-books.

126. *Songs of Grecian years* : Greek poetry and culture indicative of a higher kind of wealth.

127. *Why .... proud? .... aloud* : The line obviously gives a laboured internal rhyme.

The contrast between the brothers and the sister is further brought out in this Stanza (121-128). The source of pride for the brothers is material wealth and their prosperous business, while the sister valued culture and idealism.

129. *Self-retired* : Self-centred ; intensely selfish, being absorbed in their own affairs, without any sympathy for others.

130. *Hungry-pride* : They were proud as well as greedy.

130. *Gainful cowardice* : They were bent upon making money and at the same time cowardly. 'Cowardly' means not prepared to take risks, or always haunted by the fear of losing money.

131. *As two close Hebrews* : The two brothers were as secretive as Jews—they were in the habit of keeping secret all their trading concerns and the wealth they amassed.

131. *That land inspired* : Italy is a land of inspired poets and painters. Dante, Petrarch and other poets of Italy were not only great poets but they inspired and influenced the poets of other countries.

132. *Pal'd in .... beggar-spies* : Enclosed by their vineyards they lived such a secluded life that they were free from the trouble of beggars, who secretly watched all their movements.

133. *The hawks of shipmast forests* : As hawks pounce upon their prey, so did these brothers pounce upon ships heavily laden with merchandise.

133. *Ship-mast forests* : Numerous ships heavily laden with rich merchandise.

134. *Pannier'd mules* : They were like mules with baskets on their backs for carrying heavy loads of money. *Old lies*—fraudulent schemes practised from ancient times.

135. *Quick cat's-paws etc* : Like cats they softly and stealthily fell upon simple, unsuspecting travellers and defrauded them of their wealth.

136. *Great wits etc* : They were quite familiar with these languages.

137. *Ledger-men* : Most powerfully expresses the selfish greed of the brothers.

138. *Downy nest* : Implies all the sweetness very tenderness and warmth that we associate with home.

140. *A straying from his toil* : Neglect of duty on account of distraction ; in this case, love.

140-141. *Hot .... sly* ! : The poet pronounces here a curse on the brothers. He wishes that their greedy, cunning eyes were blinded by the burning sands of Egypt.

142. *Money-bags* : This expression is used sarcastically and means " greedy men amassing money ".

143-144. *Every dealer fair .... hunted hare*: Every honest man or merchant must be careful in his dealings with dishonest merchants or tradesmen, lest he be deceived by them, even as a hunted hare looks round to escape from its pursuers.

Stanza XIX : An apostrophe to the revered old poet Boccaccio, who narrates the same story with perfect equanimity. Keats, however, has lost his temper (quite natural for a young poet dealing with the theme of love) in describing the ways of the brothers. and feels it necessary to apologise to his master for disturbing the smooth flow of the narrative.

Boccaccio (Giovanni)—1313-1375—Italian novelist, poet, and humanist, known chiefly for the *Decameron*, a collection of tales, written between 1348-1358, and drawn from many sources. Among the poets who found inspiration in his works were Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dryden, Keats, Longfellow and Tennyson.

146. *Forgiving boon*: The favour of forgiveness.

148. *Roses amorous .... moon*: Roses in their beauty and fragrance inspire love as the moon in her soft light inspires it.

150. *Ghittern*: A stringed musical instrument like a guitar.

151-152. *For venturing syllable .... piteous theme*: For venturing to use language so harsh and inappropriate to the pathos of a melancholy subject.

152. *Quiet glooms .... theme*: The quiet serenity of the pathetic story.

Stanza XX : Here is an explanation on the part of Keats for versifying Boccaccio's melodious prose narrative. He did it with no spite or envy in his heart, but with the most honest intention of popularising and immortalising his dear old master.

155. *No mad assail*: The very attempt to surpass Boccaccio in melody appeared to Keats as a mad or foolish effort.

159. *To stead thee .... tongue*: To popularize and immortalize Boccaccio in English language. Translating Boccaccio into English would be doing loyal service to the old master.

159. *To stead thee*: To do thee service. The phrase reminds the reader of the usual phrase "to stand in good stead".

The reader should note that the retrospective narration is over here, and that the thread of the story, which was left at Stanza XIV, is taken up once more with Stanza XXI.

163. *Unconfines* : Reveals ; discloses.

165. *Trade designs* : Commercial adventures ; Profitable schemes.

167-168. *To coax .... olive trees* : To induce her to marry some rich nobleman, master of large estates.

173. *Men of cruel clay* : Of the earth, earthly, and very wicked.

174. *Cut Mercy .... bone* : Cut mercy to pieces i.e. they killed whatever mercy they had in their hearts. They determined to murder Lorenzo in the most merciless manner possible. It should be noted that the metaphor is unhappily carried too far.

178. *Baluistarde* : A row of small pillars.

180. *Through the dews* : Indicates an early time before sunrise.

182-3. *We are .... speculation* : We are unwilling to disturb you in your calm meditation.

184. *Bestride .... skies* : Mount your horse before the sun rises and gets hot, and follow us to the hunt.

184. *Bestride* : Mount.

187-188. *The hot sun .... eglantine* : Before the sun gets hot and the dew on the creepers is dried up. The sun, drying up the dew drop by drop from the eglantine, is compared to a Roman Catholic, who counts the beads of a rosary while saying his prayer.

190. *Serpent's whine* : The serpent hisses, while it is the dog that whines. Keats only wants to suggest the treacherous villainy of the brothers.

192. *With belt, and spur .... and dress* : These monosyllables emphatically convey the readiness and hurry with which Lorenzo got ready.

195. *Matin-song* : Early morning song.

197. *Over his passion hung* : Lingered on account of deep love.

199-200. These lines conjure up a very vivid picture of the scene.

203-205. *What if .... absence* : I cannot even imagine how miserable I would be, if I should lose you permanently, when I find

it so very difficult to control my feelings at the thought of separation from you for a few hours. *Fain* is usually used in the sense of 'willing'; here it appears to bear the sense of "being left with no other alternative" or "being absolutely helpless".

206. *Amorous dark*: Evening devoted to the sport of love. 'Amorous' is a very unhappy 'transferred epithet'.

205-206. *We'll gain .... doth borrow*: Evening with its darkness, will restore to us the joy of meeting which the day deprives us of.

209. *Murder'd man*: The man to be murdered.

210. *Fair Florence*: The simple word "fair" fully brings out the rich beauty of Florence.

210-213. *To where .... the freshets*: A vivid picture of the river Arno bubbling through narrow rocky banks on which the bulrush is growing gracefully, wafted to and fro by the wind. The bream fish is sportingly rearing up its head against the water current.

213. *Freshets*: Little streams of fresh water.

213-215: *Sick and wan .... with love*: Keats finely suggests the criminal mentality of the brothers, turned pale with the fear of their intended crime, as opposed to the happy mood of innocent Lorenzo.

217. *There was .... buried in*: The reader may note here that the act of murder is stated simply in a single line. Keats is following perhaps the Greek Tragedians who often *narrated* such crimes through the chorus, instead of describing them in detail or representing them on the stage. Shakespeare, in his tragedies, on the other hand, devotes complete scenes to such crimes and sends a thrill of horror through the audience. The poet or dramatist must be allowed freedom to choose his mode of expression or to choose his way of presenting his material. The ultimate criterion of the value of the work should be the *result* and not so much the *means*.

219-220. *Ah! .... loneliness*: By murder the soul is violently separated from the body and lives miserably in solitude. This separation is forced on the soul, which it feels very keenly and poignantly. Natural death, on the other hand, effects a separation which the soul accepts quietly and peacefully.

221. *As the break-covert blood-hounds of such sin* : The soul of a murdered person pursues the murderer, and is never at rest till it finds him out, even as the blood-hounds employed to track down a murderer, never rest till they have succeeded in tracking him down. Here the soul of a murdered person, restlessly pursuing the murderer, is compared to blood-hounds employed to track down a murderer.

222. *They dipp'd .... water* : They washed off the blood from their swords, but the stains of crime were permanent in their hearts. They are only images of miserable Macbeth.

222. *Tease* : Torment.

223. *Convulsed spur* : They spurred their horses in a violent manner.

224. *Each richer .... murderer* : Each one is burdened with the sin of the murder. The murder of Lorenzo is an addition to the record of their evil deeds.

Stanza XXIX : As usual with criminals, the brothers are inventing excuses for the absence of Lorenzo, which the innocent girl implicitly believes in.

227. *Great urgency* : Very important business.

229. *Widow's weed* : The mourning dress of a widow. The word "weed" is used in the plural (weed) in this sense.

229-230 : The poet is addressing Isabella in these lines and asking her to get ready for what is in store for her—nothing but miserable widowhood—and to give up all false hopes about the return of her lover.

One wonders whether this elaborate way of suggesting her misfortunes is absolutely necessary. In fact, it smacks of sentimentality.

230. *Hope's accented bands* : As long as a man hopes, he believes that his sorrows will soon end and happiness come ; but more often than not, he is sorely disappointed. He goes on hoping, only to be disappointed. Cf.

आशायां परमं दुःखं नैराश्यं परमं सुखम् ।

235-236. *And then ... alone* : Isabella was counting on the early return of her lover at dusk, but unfortunately, she had to feed herself merely on the memory of her past happiness. The future was so miserably dark for her.

236. *The luxury, i.e.* the joy or happiness of love.

237-238. *His image .... moan* : A very realistic picture of Isabella's mental condition, which, on account of extreme expectancy, verges on ditsraction. The memory of the past is too vivid to be untrue, and she still feels her lover within the reach of her arms. The reality, however, is a shocking disillusionment brought out by the words " Where ? O where ? "

239. *Perfect arms* : Suggests the peerless beauty of Isabella.

240-41. A very unpoetic way of expressing the idea that Isabella was not utterly selfish in her grief. She might appear to worry about her own disappointment, when, as a matter of fact, she was equally worried by the absence of Lorenzo, who might have been equally unhappy. Love may start with self-interest, but to describe selfishness as love's cousin is indeed strange.

242. *Fiery vigil* : painful watch.

242. *Single breast* : Her heart full of one thought or one feeling ; full of love for Lorenzo.

244. *Feverish unrest* : Restlessness which was almost agonising.

245-246. *A throng .... occupants* : A crowd of unselfish thoughts about the fate of her love.

246. *A richer zest* : A nobler passion, because it is unselfish.

247. *Came tragic* : Tortured her heart.

Stanza XXXI is one of the unhappy stanzas in the poem—very crude in expression. The working of Isabel's mind, however, is correctly represented.

Stanza XXXII : The poet describes here the gradual fading away of Isabel's beauty by specially using the Homeric Simile. As in Nature, the first breath of cold winter robs the leaves of trees of their green colour and spreads signs of decay everywhere, so did the absence of Lorenzo affect the loveliness of Isabella.

The beauty of the Homeric Simile lies in the world of details it creates and suggests. Keats is a master-hand at depicting the gradual wearing away of beauty in nature and in human life.

252. *Roundelay* : A dance in a circle.

Stanza XXXII : This is the only stanza where the sense of the earlier stanzas lingers.

259. *Striving .... itself* : Isabella is obviously controlling her tears in the presence of her brothers.

259. *Dungeon climes* : Foreign countries which have temporarily detained him as in a prison.

262. *Hinnom's vale* : The valley of Hinnom in Jerusalem where Moloch, the fierce King, was worshipped with bloody sacrifices. Children were sacrificed by their parents to appease the fierce deity.

261-262. *Their crimes .... vale* : The brothers felt as miserable after the murder as the parents who sacrificed their children in a religious frenzy.

264. *Sister .... snowy shroud* : In their dreams they saw their sister wrapt in a snow-white winding-sheet.

265. *Had died* : Would have died.

265. *Drowsy ignorance* : Ignorance about Lorenzo's fate benumbing or chilling her mental faculties.

266. *A thing ..... all* : The mysterious and frightful appearance of the spirit of Lorenzo.

267-269. *It came .... moments* : The visit of Lorenzo's spirit came to Isabella most unexpectedly. It gave her a temporary relief, but could not save her from death ; it was like a strong dose of medicinal wine, luckily administered to a dying patient to postpone his death only for a few moments.

268. *The feather'd pall* : Death and burial. The pall is a black cloth, which is thrown over a coffin. The feathers are black plumes fixed on the hearse.

270. *An Indian .... cloudy hall* : The dying Indian who is dreaming of heaven.

270. *Cloudy hall* : His wigwam or hut filled with smoke.

271. *Cruel pierce* : Cruel thrust.

272. *Sense .... brain* : A momentary consciousness of life which only reminds him of his dreadful agonies (*gnawing fire*).

The simile of the Red Indian, with his agonies, appears to be absolutely out of taste and out of place.

273-275. The shadow of *Hamlet* appears to be clearly cast over this scene. Like Shakespeare, Keats reveals the mystery of the murder through the agency of a spirit.

277-278. *Put....lips*: Had deprived his lips of their bright, rosy colour, and his voice of its softness and sweetness.

279-280. *Past.... tears*: Tears had gushed forth from his eyes at the time of his death, and found their way (*miry channel*) over the ears, which were covered over with the mud of the tomb (*loamed ears*). It seems to be a common practice with the poets not to allow the bodies of murdered people, or of those who have died a natural death, to rot or reek. They might be soiled by mud, but they do not stink. Otherwise the introduction of the dead person in the poem will cease to have any pleasurable effect.

279. *Lorn*: Hopeless, sad.

279. *Loamed*: Filled with loam or earth.

281. *Pale shadow*: The ghost with its shadowy appearance.

282. *For .... striving*: Nearly a fortnight must have elapsed since Lorenzo was murdered, and on account of the absence of human contact during this period, his spirit must have specially exerted to recover human speech.

285-286. *And tremulous .... unstrung*: The spirit's voice trembled on account of emotion, in the same measure as the loose strings of a harp which are played upon by a Druid enfeebled by paralysis. Neither in the voice of the spirit nor in the notes of the harp is there any strength or distinctness.

287-288. The spirit talked in a low, feeble voice which was mournful indeed. It was as much muffled as the night-wind that blows through the thorny bushes in a grave-yard. No trace of hope or cheer could be found in the spirit's voice.

288. *Like hoarse .... among*: Every word in the line heightens the ghostly effect.

Stanza XXXVII : Like Hamlet's father, Lorenzo's spirit is narrating the story of the murder.

289. *Wild*: Strange and fearful.

290. *Phantom fear*: Fear inspired by the ghost of Lorenzo.

292-293. *It did unthread .... time*: The spirit revealed up the mystery of the foul murder, and the horrid manner and circumstances of its perpetration.

293. *Darkened*: It suggests so much—(1) done in secret, (2) darkly evil or wicked, (3) in the darkness of the forest.

293-294. *The murderous .... avarice* : The murder done through jealousy and malice by the brothers, who are known to be proud and greedy.

295. *The sodden turfed dell* : The green grassy valley ; sodden, wet.

298. *Whortle-berry* : Bilberry, fruit of a hardy shrub growing on heaths and woods.

303-304. *Go .... tomb* : Such a desire for human sympathy and love is often expressed by the spirit of the dead, when the person dies with his desires unfulfilled.

The details given by the spirit to Isabella to enable her to find out the scene of the murder, indicate that the crime was committed on the outskrits of the forest and not in its dark depths. The spirit could listen to the bleating of sheep, grazing by the river-side (Lines 301-302).

305-306. The world of spirits is very close to the world of human beings ; but free communication between the two is forbidden. To the spirits it is only a tantalising situation—very miserable indeed !

307. *I chant alone the holy mass* : I sing my prayer alone and feel very unhappy. *Holy mass* = Prayers at the celebration of the Eucharist.

308. *While .... kneeling* : Every sound that he hears is like a death-knell to him, because it reminds him that he no longer belongs to the human world.

311. *Paining me through* : All signs of human life around me pierce my heart.

311. *Those sounds ..... to me* : In course of time, he fails to recognise the human sounds—they appear like a mystery to him.

312. *And thou .... Humanity* : The very sounds of the lines suggest the vast gulf that separates the spirit from its beloved. One of the fine pathetic lines in the poem.

314. *Rage* : Speak madly—go mad.

313-314. No words could be simpler than these, but none more powerful to express the utter despair of the spirit. The contrast between the happy past and the wretched present is simply galling.

316. *That paleness .... grave*: The pallor on Isabel's face is the result of her suffering for her lover, which is a source of comfort to his spirit, however strange it may appear to the indifferent world.

316-318. *As though .... spouse*: Such loyalty as Isabel's (indicated by her suffering) is a rare thing in the human world, and Lorenzo's spirit is rejoiced at the happy choice of his bride in Isabel, who now appears to him to be more an angel of the bright heavens than a mortal being.

317. *Bright abyss*: The shining "hollow of heaven".

On the whole, one of the beautiful stanzas in the poem, in thought, feeling, and expression (313-320).

321-322. *Dissolved.... turmoil*: The spirit disappeared, piercing the darkness around and leaving it (darkness) in a confused mass of moving particles.

322. *Atom darkness*: When we thrust our heads into a pillow, the darkness appears to be mixed with specks of light moving up and down.

325. *Pillowy cleft*: A hollow in a pillow.

326. *Spangly gloom*: Darkness mixed with specks of light.

323-326. *As when .... boil*: A very elaborate simile which means, when we are denied the pleasure of happy sleep and remember the hard work of the day (*rugged hours*) and the disappointments associated with it, we are very restless.

327-328. *It made .... awake*: After the spirit had disappeared, Isabella had not a wink of sleep throughout the rest of the night. She got up at dawn absolutely bewildered.

329. *Hard*: Hard to understand, and therefore mysterious.

331-332. *I thought .... us*: I thought that our lot in life was either to enjoy life or to suffer the joy and sorrow ending ultimately in death.

333. *But there .... bloody knife*: Isabella here talks of her staggering discovery, namely, sin and crime, which are more agonising than mere suffering. Such sin and crime, moreover, may not be distant—may be found in your own kith and kin.

334. *Thou ..... infancy*: You have opened my eyes to the grim realities of the world. I was lulled so long by innocent ignorance.

337. *Devised* : Planned.

338. *Secret* : (adv.) Secretly.

339. *The clay* : The dead body of Lorenzo.

340. *Lullaby* : One last song of farewell to comfort the soul of Lorenzo. 'Lullaby' properly means a soothing cradle song.

341. *Unsurmised* : Not guessed, unsuspected.

342. *The inmost of the dream* : The truth of the information given by the spirit.

344. *And .... forest-hearse* : Went into the dreary forest, where lay the grave of her lover.

344. *Hearse* : The carriage to carry the coffin.

From Stanza XLIV onwards we see the heroine on the move, taking initiative in the matter. Upto now she was merely a passive character, quietly enjoying the delights of love ; but all her movements were controlled by her brothers. The reader may note that women in love, though passive for a long time, are often represented as gathering supreme courage in critical moments in their life. Hardy's Tess, in her readiness to murder Alexander, who had ruined her life, is a typical instance in point.

345-348. The visualising power of these lines should not go unnoticed.

347. *Champaign* : Open country.

348-349. *What .... child ?* : The first fears of the old nurse were that Isabella was off her head. For a time she must have been stunned by the sight of the knife.

348. *Feverous hectic flame* : A burning flush was seen on her face on account of the feverish, highly excited state of her body and mind.

349. *What .... betide* : The nurse could not understand why Isabella was smiling when her life on earth could never be happy again. She interprets her smile as that of a lunatic.

349. *Betide* : Happen.

Stanza XLV : Keats means to say in the stanza, that when Isabella approached the grave of her lover in the forest, her fear, horror, and bewilderment at the mystery of death could better be imagined than that are in appropriate words. Her tragic

experience far surpassed the thoughts and feelings generally roused in a grave-yard.

354-355. *And let.....hard* : Everyone who enters a grave-yard allows his mind to roam far and wide in the mysterious land of death and its paraphernalia.

356. *Funeral stole* : A long loose garment in which a dead body is dressed.

357-358. He is saddened by the fate of mortals, helpless victims to death, and tries to penetrate the mystery of death.

359-360. *Ah! this .... knelt* : This feeling though extremely horrible could be joy or pleasure, as compared with what Isabella felt when she knelt by the side of Lorenzo's grave.

361. *Fresh-thrown mould* : Suggests that much time had not passed since Lorenzo was murdered and buried ; perhaps about a fortnight.

363. *She saw* : She saw in imagination.

365-366. The pure innocent figure of Isabella stood out on the dark background of the scene of murder, like a beautiful lily springing from a dark valley. The simile administers a welcome relief to the reader whost mind is under great tension.

368. *To dig .... can.* The unhappy simile is obviously dragged in by the mussity of rhyme.

369. *Turned up* : Discovered.

370. *Her .... phantasies* : She had embroidered fanciful designs in bright colours (on the glove). Cf. "She spoilt her half-done broidery with the same." (Stanza II).

372-374. *Where it dries .... cries* : The glove was now a tragic memory to her. She put it next to her breasts which were extremely pained by it. In the normal course of things, she would have suckled her child at her breasts to her immense delight and the pleasure of the child.

375. *Stayed .... care* : She did not stop digging on account of her anxiety and interest.

379. Isabel had, upto now, led a very soft life and was in no way accustomed to hard work like digging.

382. *Travail sore* : Hard, painful work.

383. *The kernel of the grave* : The corpse of Lorenzo. The corpse in a grave is compared to the kernel in a nut.

384. *And Isabella .... rave* : At the sight of Lorenzo's dead body, Isabella absolutely controlled herself. As the nurse feared she did not give way to any violent passion at that moment, but was calm and composed.

385. *Wormy circumstance* : Disgusting details about the grave.

387-389. If the reader does not like the way the poet is narrating the story—things like the wormy circumstance—he is free to go to Boccaccio's story, pathetic in tone but sweet and gentle in expression.

390-391. *For here .... to speak* : Keats means to say that he is not inclined to argue out whether his way of narrating the story is better than Boccaccio's. He politely suggests to the reader to read the older story if he does not like the romantic version of the poet.

392. *And taste .... vision pale* : Read that passage in which Boccaccio melodiously describes how Isabella dug out the pale dead body of her lover.

393-396. They cut off the head of Lorenzo, who was gentle and courteous during his life-time and who also appeared to be gentle after death. In contrast to this, stands the action of Perseus who killed Medusa, the most terrible of the Gorgons, with a sharp sword. One fails to understand why Perseus and his exploits are dragged in here unless Keats wants to show off his acquaintance with Greek legends.

395-396. *Whose gentleness .... as life* : Whose face had the same gentle expression in death as it had in life.

396. *The ancient harps* : Old poets.

398-399. *If .... moan'd*: To Isabella Lorenzo was the incarnation of love, whom she worshipped during his lifetime and after death. This simple idea could have been expressed quite in a simple fashion, without any reference to old poets and their talk about love's immortality.

400. *Dead .... dethron'd* : Isabella's love for Lorenzo did not die ; it still reigned in her heart.

401. *In .... home* : They carried home the head in secret and were anxious that nobody noticed them carrying it.

402. The head of her dead lover constituted her wide world.

404. *Sepulchral cell* : Empty socket.

405. *Smeared loam* : The earth with which his face was besmeared or daubed.

405. *Pointed .... lash* : Straightened the eye-lashes.

402-407. These details of Isabella's devotion to her dead lover send a thrill of horror and disgust through the reader's mind. Keats has rightly anticipated such an objection on the part of the reader and answered it in his own way. There can be no doubt that this is the *wormiest circumstance* he has put in the poem.

409-410. *Sweet .... flowers* : Sweet with the fragrance of flowers.

411. *Divine liquids* : Heavenly scents.

411. *With odorous ooze* : In a gentle, fragrant flow.

412. *Serpent pipe* : Serpent-shaped bottle.

410-412. The memory of Arabia with her rich scents is too irresistible for the poet to avoid.

415. *Mould* : Earth.

416. *Basil* : A kind of romantic 'herb', Sweet Basil being its common variety. One of the superstitions associated with this plant is that it thrives on the brains of murdered persons. This belief is finely expressed in the story of this poem.

417-424. Here is one of the most appealing stanzas in the poem. Isabella completely forgets the beautiful world of nature, and of human life around her. Devotion to love reaches its supreme height in her life. Self-forgetfulness of this noble kind is very rare in the world. The repetition of the phrase "she forgot" and the list of objects she forgot fully bring out the pathetic effect of the lines. They cannot but evoke the sympathy and admiration of the reader for Isabella.

427. *Peers* : Equals. Here it means 'companions'.

431. *The Jewel* : i.e. Lorenzo's head which she prized beyond her life.

432. *Leafits* : Small leaves. The word is wrongly spelt.

435. *Echo* : In Greek mythology Echo is represented as a nymph who dies broken-hearted, because her love for Narcissus was not requited.

436. *Lethean* : Pertaining to Lethe, one of the rivers of Hell, causing forgetfulness of the past to all who drank of it.

439. *Cypress glooms* : The dark shadows cast by cypress trees which are planted in grave-yards. The words are to be taken metaphorically here.

442. *Melpomene* : The Muse of Tragedy.

444. *A mystery* : Refers to the mystery of evil usually handled in tragedies.

450. *Let not .... hour* : Let Isabella die her own peaceful death ; the cold winter need not add to its misery by hastening it.

451. *It may not be* : That is the tragedy of life : one cannot choose one's way of life, nor of death.

451. *Baalites of pelf* : Worshippers of money. The brothers are appropriately described as the worshippers of money like the old Hebrews who worshipped the false God, Baal—a false form of the Sun-God.

451. *Pelf* : This word is used in contempt for 'riches.'

453. *Elf* : Primarily means a 'fairy'. Here it only means a mischief-monger.

454-455. *Dower of youth* : Gift of youth.

462. *A very nothing* : The most insignificant plant.

462-463. *To wean her from .... youth* : To make her give up all thoughts of her youth and its enjoyments.

465-466. *Sift this hidden whim* : Investigate the matter and find out the truth.

466. *The hidden whim* : The brothers could not understand such true love. They thought that it was a mere fancy or caprice of their sister !

467. *Chapel-shrift* : Confession to a priest in a church.

470. *Breast its eggs* : Brood or sit on its eggs. The word 'breast' is wrongly used here. The simile aptly brings home to the reader the extreme anxiety of her heart to guard the pot of Basil.

475. *Livid* : Bluish.

475. The head in the Pot was decaying, was discoloured, and looked a horrid thing.

477. *The guerdon of their murder* : Their reward was a guilty conscience, which would ever make them unhappy. How humiliated they must have felt at the sight of Lorenzo's head !

478. Another echo of the French Version.

480. *Blood* : The guilt of murder.

479-480. *Away they .... banishment* : With a deep sense of utter failure and remorse, the brothers left Florence never to return, and never hoped to wash away the stains of blood on their hands. Their humiliation and repentance are bitter beyond measure.

Stanza LXI : Practically a repetition of Stanza LV.

481. *Turn .... away* : The sight of lovely Isabella dying is too pathetic to look on even for Melancholy.

485. "*Well-a-way*!" A song of mourning. Literally, *well-a-way* is an interjection, suggesting grief.

487. *Incomplete* : Premature, her death being hastened by the theft of the Pot of Basil.

489. *Piteous she looked ..... senseless things* : She was no longer interested in living things; her interests were with the dead, not with the living.

490. *Amorously* : On account of her devoted love. Usually the word suggests light-hearted, frivolous love.

491-492. Utter despair sometimes drove her to real madness, as suggested by the phrase 'melodius chuckle.' *Chuckle* : Another unsuitable word.

493. *The Pilgrim* : The reference may be to Lorenzo who is called a palmer in Stanza I or to any pilgrim passing through Florence.

A plain, simple and quite pathetic end to Isabel's life is suggested in Stanza LXIII. Her tragic tale becomes immensely popular with the public of Florence.

500. *So overcast* : So covered over with clouds of sorrow; so sad or melancholy lit. *overcast* = clouded.

501. *Born* : The correct form is "borne" = carried.

503. *Burthen* : The burden or refrain of the song—the lines repeated at the end of each stanza.

503-504. After all, Keats ends the story with Isabella's pathetic cry against the cruelty of the world, though he has suggested earlier that in a love-story the glory and triumph of love should be emphasised and not its pathos.

Notes

THE EVE OF ST. AGNES

The title : It is the evening previous to the day, 21st January, dedicated to St. Agnes, the patron saint of virgins. It was a popular belief that by performing certain ceremonies (Keats mentions them in detail in the course of the story) on St. Agnes' Eve, one would dream of the person whom one was destined to marry. The eve is also called the *vigil*, and the day, the *feast*.

St. Agnes was a Roman maiden, only thirteen years old, who won a name for her purity, beauty and innocence. The son of a Roman Prefect (High Official) sought her love, which she could not requite on account of her Christian religion. Then started her persecution, in the course of which various miracles, like striking her tormentors blind and extinguishing blazing fire, were associated with her name. In the end she was beheaded, and on account of her martyrdom, was canonized on 21st January, 304 A.D. Brand adds the detail in the story that when her parents prayed at her tomb, they saw their daughter among angels with a lamp by her side. Religious persecution in the days of the Roman Emperors like Nero (1st cent.) and Diolectian (3rd cent.) was a very common thing, and those Christains who stood it bravely attained sainthood after their death. Young Agnes was a martyr to such religious persecution and became the patron saint of virgins after her death.

The accumulation of details in Stanza I brings out fully the sense of severe cold on the eve of St. Agnes.

1. *Ah* : No editor of Keats will fail to notice the dramatic effect of this exclamation, which suggests that the poet was actually feeling the shivers of cold.

2. *For all feathers* : In spite of the protection of his thick feathers.

3. From the world of birds the poet passes on to the world of animals, wild and domestic. The grass, covered thick with snow, bites and cuts the tender feet of the hare. It goes on limping.

4. *Wooly fold* : The wool on their bodies formed a good warm protection against the severe cold. In spite of this natural protection, the flock of sheep, clustered in their warm fold, are not inclined to move.

5-9. : The poet now comes to the human world and naturally describing lingers longer in the effect of the cold.

5-6. *Told his rosary* : Counted the beads of his rosary—a string of 165 beads ; the smaller rosary has only 55.

6. *Frosted breath* : The breath that was frozen by the damp in the air.

7. *A censer* : A vessel in which incense is burnt.

7. *Pious incense* : (transferred epithet) Incense burnt by the pious people.

The breath of the Beadsman appears to heaven like a saint after death, even though it is not dead. The personification of the breath into a saint is rather too far-fetched.

9. *Virgin's picture* : The picture of Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ.

Stanza II conveys further the effect of severe cold, particularly inside the chapel.

12. *Meagre .... wan* : The reader should note the sense of slow motion brought about by a chain of adjectives. Keats seems to be particularly fond of this device, as he repeats it in line 187.

13. *The Chapel* : A small church attached to the great castle of a knight or a lord, where the members of his family prayed and were buried after death. Such chapels were a common feature of large estates in the Middle Ages.

13. *Aisle* : One of the wings of the chapel separated from the central portion (including the nave and the choir) by pillars.

13. *Degrees* : The word is used here in its original sense "steps".

14. *The sculptur'd dead .... freeze* : The poet very cunningly suggests that even the statues of the dead began to shiver in the cold.

15. *Black, purgatorial rails* : The statues are surrounded by black railing, which the poet interprets as iron bars within which each soul is confined in purgatory—a place where the spirits of the dead are purged of their sins by practising penance. Dante in his *Divine Comedy,* his great epic, divides the universe into three regions—Paradiso, Purgatorio, and Inferno.

We agree with Bain who points out that the leap from black rails to Purgatories is too wide indeed.

16. *Orat'ries* : Places for private prayers or worships.

16. *Dumb* : Quiet ; silent.

18. *How they .... mails* : The poet pointedly suggests the effect of severe cold on the statues.

20. *Music's golden tongue* : As in the previous poem, Keats effectively employs here the device of contrast. There is bitter, biting cold in the dark chapel, while there is sweet music, warmth and brilliance in the adjoining castle.

21-22. : The first effect of the music was to touch and delight his heart. But the old man remembered that he is at the end of his pilgrimage, and that death is knocking at the door.

21. *Flattered to tears* : Moved to tears of joy by the entrancing strains of music.

23. : A fine pathetic line.

23. *Were said and sung* : Had practically ceased to exist.

24. *His was .... penance* : The Beadsman has to pray for the saving of his soul as also for the souls of his masters.

26. *Rough ashes* : He began to practise severe penance.

26. *Reprieve* : Pardon (Literally the suspension of capital punishment).

28. *The prelude soft* : Music which was the beginning of the festivities in the castle.

31. *Snarling* : Harsh sounding.

31. *'gan to chide* : The shrill notes of the trumpets were very unpleasant to listen to, particularly in contrast to the soft prelude in the earlier line.

32. *The level ..... pride*: The big broad halls, with their smooth floors and rich furniture.

32. *With their pride*: With their magnificent furniture.

33. *Glowing*: Were brilliantly illuminated.

34-36. *The carved angels .... breasts*: The figures of angels carved under the cornice with their hair blown black and their wings put cross-wise, lent a solemn grandeur to the hall.

34. *Eager ey'd*: The angels of the highest order are supposed to be endowed with an extraordinary power of vision.

35. *Cornice*: Ornamental projection just below the ceiling.

36. *With hair blown back*: With their hair blown back by the wind.

37. *Argent*: Silver-bright, resplendent.

37. *Revelry*: Revellers: those who give themselves up to causing or feasting. Notice the use of the abstract for that concrete.

38. *Plumes*: The feathers in men's head-dress proudly worn.

38. *Tiara*: A small jewelled crown as a lady's head-dress.

39-41. *Numerous ..... old romance*: The richly and brightly dressed men and women in the hall looked like fairy-knights and ladies in old books of romance.

39-40. *Haunting faerily the brain*: Crowding on the mind like the forms of fairies, indistinct and beautiful.

40. *In youth*: Young men read books of romance with avidity and their minds are filled with the deeds of knights, etc.

40. *With triumphs gay*: With the heroic adventures of the old days of chivalry.

42. *Sole thoughted*: With one single thought, thinking of nothing but one subject. This is Keat's own coinage.

43. *All that wintry day*: Throughout that day in winter, January 20th.

44. *Wing'd St. Agnes*: St. Agnes was an angel and therefore she is described as having wings.

44. *Wing'd St. Agnes' care*: Like a true maiden she thought she enjoyed the special protection of St. Agnes on that particular day.

Keats refers to the superstitious beliefs and practices associated with the Eve of St. Agnes in Stanza VI.

48. *Soft adorings .... loves* : Soft or gentle worship from their lovers.

49. *The honeyed .... the might* : The sweet, delightful midnight ; a typically sensuous expression.

52. *Supine* : On their backs.

52. *Their beauties, lily white* : Their beautiful limbs, as white as lilies. Another beautiful expression.

55. *Whim* : Superstitious belief.

56. *The music yearning like a God* : Music is striving hard to express itself in the most soul-stirring strains. Music is compared to a God, earnestly and intensely longing to express himself.

57. *Divine* : A very comprehensive word, suggestive of sweetness, charm and lustre.

57. *Her maiden eyes divine* : Her eyes had the sweet innocence of a maiden and also divine purity and radiance. This expression is a reminiscence of Milton : " Human face divine "—*Paradise Lost*, Book III, ll. 43-44.

58. *Many a sweeping train* : The large crowd of knight-errants trying to attract her attention as they pass by her.

60. *Tiptoe* : Full of eagerness and anxiety.

60. *Amorous* : Full of love ; ready to make love to.

60. *Cavalier* : A young gallant.

61-62. *Not cool'd high disdain .... saw not* : Not disheartened by the cold scorn shown by Madeline. Of course, Madeline did not wilfully offend them. She was so absorbed in her dreams that she failed to take notice of her suitors as they passed by. ' High disdain ' is a Miltonic expression. See *Paradise Lost*, Book I, l. 98.

62. *Otherwhere* : Elsewhere, in another place. She was thinking of the dream, in which she longed to see her lover.

63. *Sigh'd for* : Intensely, earnestly longed for.

63. *Agnes' dreams* : The visions to be seen on St. Agnes's Eve.

63. *The sweetest of the year* : Because in those dreams she will have the vision or sight of her future husband.

64. Madeline was mechanically following the rules of courtesy.

64. *Regardless* : Vacant, blank.

65. *Anxious her lips* : Lips most eager to be kissed by her lover.

66. *The hallow'd hour* : The hour of midnight, sacred to St. Agnes, when Madeline expected to have a vision of her lover.

67. *Timbrels* : Long narrow drums.

67-68. *The thronged ..... sport* : The whole crowd of guests, some of whom felt offended by her neglect, while others took it light-heartedly.

70. *Hoodwinked* : Renders blind by her romantic passion.

70. *Hoodwinked .... fancy* : Madeline was engrossed in her sweet, romantic dreams.

70. *Amort* : Dead, inattentive.

71. *Save to St. Agnes* : She was unconscious of everything around her except St. Agnes, on whom her thoughts were fixed, and on the supreme happiness she was to enjoy in seeing her future spouse.

71. *Lambs unshorn* : This refers to the practice of offering two unshorn lambs to St. Agnes on the day sacred to her.

Stanza IX introduces the hero of the poem in a romantic fashion.

73-74. *So ....still* : These words fully bring out the struggle between hope and fear in Madeline's heart.

74. *Across the moors* : Takes the reader over wide tracts of land, which Porphyro has crossed to meet the queen of his heart.

75. *Heart on fire* : Heart aglow with love—an expression full of life.

76. *Beside the portal doors* : The reader should note that the long anxious journey, suggested by "across the moors" and "with heart of fire" comes to an end here. Porphyro is now within the gates of his paradise. Keats has justly dropped out unnecessary details of the journey.

77. *Buttress'd .... moonlight* : Kept in the shadow of the buttress (support of the castle-wall) and hence hidden or sheltered from the moonlight by the buttresses of the castle walls. The first note of romantic atmosphere is struck in his line. "Buttress"

brings to our mind a picture of the splendid castle of Medieval times, while moonlight suggests the magic atmosphere.

77-78. *Implores .... Madeline* : In Medieval romances, religion plays as much part as the spirit of adventure.

79. : Strikingly enough, the yearnings both of the hero and the heroine perfectly coincide. One single look at his beloved would compensate for all the trouble he has undergone so far.

81. *In sooth .... been* : In truth such things have happened. —in the romantic world there is hardly anything like an impossibility.

Who, indeed, can fail to note the influence of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in Stanza X? Like Romeo, Porphyro enters an inhospitable place.

84. *Love's fev'rous citadel* : His heart full of passionate love is compared to a fortress. His heart in which, as in a fortress, love feverishly keeps guard.

85. *Barbarian hordes* : Savage enemies.

86. *Hyena foemen*; Enemies as ferocious as wild hyena.

86. *Hot-blooded* : Impatient, intolerant and aggressive.

87. *Execrations* : Curses.

88. *Lineage* : Descent, family.

85-87. : As suggested above, these lines work up the picture of Porphyro's brutal enemies ready to tear him to pieces. Romeo has come amidst the Capulets.

90. *Beldame* : An old woman, Madeline's nurse : Angela.

91. *Happy chance* : Lucky chances abound in romantic stories in the same measure as unexpected disasters.

92-93. *Wand .... stood* : The magic associations of the word are also to be remembered here.

94. *Far beyond* : Prophyro stood far away in the shadow of the pillars.

95. *Chorus bland* : Miltonic use of the adjective following the noun. The guests were happily singing together in sweet, soft tunes.

97. *Palsied* : Weak, trembling. Lit. affected by paralysis.

98. *Mercy* : May the Lord have mercy on you.

98. *Hie thee* : Run away.

100. *Dwarfish Hildebrand* : He was a follower of King Theodoric and a knight-errant in search of adventures. While returning home after many years' absence, he met a young knight who challenged him. There was a shock of lances and a fight with swords, the two knights "racing, tracing and foining like two wild boars." At the end it was discovered that the young challenger was his own son, Hadubrand.

This romantic story is narrated in a fragment of alliterative German verse, called *Hildebrandslied* (about the year 800).

Among the crowd in the hall there is a Hildebrand, a ferocious fighter requiring no particular cause to pick a quarrel with Porphyro.

The reader may note at this stage that in contrast to the earlier poem—*Isabella*—there is a larger amount of conversation in this poem, which enables the characters to reveal themselves fully and clearly. This adds vividness and colour to the narrative.

104. *For his grey hairs* : In spite of his old age.

105. *Gossip* : Literally—God-sib, a person related to one in God ; a God-father or God-mother. Here the word is used in the sense of an intimate friend.

108. *These stones .... bier* : You will be killed here on this spot.

110. *Brushing .... plume* : The cobwebs suggest the vastness and antiquity of the building, which even on a festive occasion like the present one, could not be thoroughly cleaned. From the *lofty plume* we can understand how like all other guests of the evening Porphyro was dressed tip-top.

111. *Well-a-day* : Alas !

112. *He found him* : He found himself.

113. *Pale* : Dimly lighted by the rays of the moon.

115-117. *By the holy .... piously* : It was a practice in those old days to sacrifice two lambs on the day dedicated to St. Agnes. Their wool was shorn off and woven into cloth by holy nuns. Porphyro is swearing by this holy loom.

116. *Secret sister-hood* : The body of nuns who lived their own secluded life.

Doesn't the reader feel, while he is going through the story, that he is every now and then reminded by the poet of the holy day dedicated to St. Agnes, when alone miraculous things could take place?

119. : Human nature is *incurable.* Sin and crime are in the blood of man. Nothing can stand in the way of his brutal desires.

120-122. *Thou must .... venture so* : To venture into the hall and hope to be spared by his enemies was as miraculous a thing as holding water in a sieve or controlling the fairy spirits of the universe.

120. *Hold water .... sieve* : The witches are credited with possessing certain supernatural powers, such as holding water in a sieve, riding through the air, etc.

121. *Liege-lord* : Lit. feudal sovereign—the great lord of medieval times from whom the vassals rented lands, in return for which they offered unswerving loyalty and service.

121. *The Elves and Fays* : Super-natural fairy beings, particularly mischievous in their nature.

122. *Amaze* : (Poetical) Amazement.

124. *The conjuror plays* : The prose order—'plays the conjuror'—performs magic rites so that she may have the vision of her future husband.

124-125. *My lady .... night* : Madeline, my beautiful mistress, believes in the charms which superstition has associated with the Eve of St. Agnes, and is going to try their efficacy to-night.

125. *Good angels .... deceive* : May the kind angels send her the happy dream she wants, if dreams are going to satisfy her (*deceive*) !

126. *Mickle* : Much (Scotch, archaic).

126. : Angela is amused by the superstitious beliefs of her mistress and is inclined to laugh a while. But at heart she is fully aware of the tragic possibilities of her beliefs.

127. *Feebly she laugheth, etc.* : Notice the alliteration in this line.

129-130. *Like puzzled .... book* : Porphyro's intense curiosity and Angela's puzzling amusement are beautifully brought out by

this simile. Porphyro, like a puzzled child, approaches old Angela, who seems to possess some secret wonders.

129. *Urchin* : Generally used in the sense of a bad or mischievous boy.

129. *Crone* : A very old woman.

130. *Riddle-book* : A book containing puzzles to be solved.

132. *Grew brilliant* : Gleamed with joy.

133-134. *He scarce could brook tears* : He could not refrain from shedding tears.

134. *Those enchantments cold* : The performance of the magic rites and undergoing the penance of fasting, keeping awake, exposed her to the chill of winter.

135. *In lap of legends old* : Lost in the sweet superstitious beliefs of old times. Notice the sweetness of liquid sounds in the expression.

The central incident of the story is suggested by Stanza XVI.

136-138. *Sudden a thought ..... riot* : An idea flashed on his mind and filled it with excitement. He flushed at the possibility of his own idea, and for a moment his heart ached with immense excitement.

138. *Purple riot* : Violent excitement.

139. *A stratagem .... start* : A trick that almost shocked the old woman. The stratagem is described in the 19th stanza.

144. : You appear to be absolutely simple and innocent ; but in truth, you are sufficiently cunning and mischievous.

In Stanza XVII, Porphyro tries to allay the fears of Angela about his rashness. In the true spirit of chivalry, he promises to behave most honourably in Madeline's chamber ; but if the occasion so demands it, he will not hesitate to risk his life in any heroic adventure.

145. *Grace* : Mercy from God, such as a sinner prays for.

148-149. : Compare Lorenzo's words in *Isabella* :

" ......I would not grieve
Thy hand by unwelcome pressing, would not fear
Thine eyes by grazing...."

148. *If one of her soft ringlets etc.* : He means he will not so much as touch a lock of her hair.

149. *Ruffian passion* : Brutal passion urging him to an outrageous deed.

151. Or if you do not believe me and refuse to help me.

151-153. : In the last resort Porphyro would create an uproar and rouse his wolfish enemies. No risk is too great for him in the cause of his love for Madeline.

153. *Beard* : Oppose boldly.

153. *More fang'd* : More ferocious than animals like tigers or wolves armed with fangs.

155. *Church-yard thing* : She who is to die soon and be buried in the church-yard.

157-158 : Angela must have known Porphyro for a fairly long time and was entirely in sympathy with him in his love affair.

158. *Plaining* : Complaining.

158-159. *Doth she bring.....Porphyro* : The pathetic words of Angela touch Porphyro to the quick, who now repents for his hot-headedness and speaks to her gently.

160 : Porphyro was desperately in love and had undergone a lot of suffering for it.

162. *Betide .... woe* : Whether good or evil befalls her.

162. *Betide* : Happen.

We learn in Stanza XIX the "stratagem" Porphyro suggested to Angela (Stanza XVI.) To lie concealed in closets or in boxes in the chambers of beloveds is the stock-in-trade of Italian romances. English writers freely borrow this stuff from Italian literature. The Elizabethan drama abounds in this trick, and even Shakespeare was not immune from the influence. Cf. *Cymbeline.*

167. *Peerless* : Without a peer or equal.

168-169. *While legion'd .... sleepy-ey'd* : Madeline on her part would be lost in her fairy-land, pursuing in her dreams the lover of her fancy. This magic land would be crowded with fairies and angels.

168. *Legion'd fairies* : Innumerable fairies. *Legion* (lit.) is a division of three to six thousand men including cavalry in ancient Roman armies.

168. *Pac'd the coverlet* : Walked over the bed-cover.

169. *Pale enchantment* : The magic influence of St. Agnes' Eve. *Pale* probably refers to the dim moonlight when magic was worked.

170-171. : Porphyro had ventured out to meet Madeline on a very stormy night—as stormy as the night on which Merlin was induced by his beloved Vivien to take refuge from the storm in an old oak tree and was left there spell-bound.

Merlin, the famous magician of King Arthur's times, was the son of a Demon from whom he learnt his magic. He is reported to have made the Round Table for Arthur Pendragon (King Arthur's father) and to have aided Arthur himself to defeat his foes by his counsel and magic. He falls desperately in love with Vivien, the Lady of the Lake, whom he teaches his magic art. She, however, to get rid of him, entices him to take resort to an old tree in a storm, and leaves him spell-bound. Magic has thus recoiled on him, and he pays his 'monstrous debt' to his Demon father.

173. *Cates* : (Usually plural) Choice food.

174. *By* : By the side of.

174. *Tambour frame* : Circular frame on which cloth is stretched to be embroidered.

177. *Catering trust* : The work of providing rich food was undertaken by her.

To cater : To supply food.

177. *Dizzy* : Confused.

178-179. *Kneel in prayer .... while* : All undertakings or adventures must be aided by prayer.

180. : Otherwise my soul will not rise from the day of resurrection.

In the Bible it is stated that on the Judgment Day the dead shall rise out of their graves and appear for judgment before God.

From Stanza XXI onwards, the action of the story moves on briskly.

181. *With busy fear* : With haste and fear.

182. *Lover's endless minutes* : Lovers are proverbial for their impatience. Time always appears to stand still for them.

184-185. *With aged . . . . espial* : Frightened on account of her inability to see clearly what was going on around her. This line may be interpreted in another way : "She was frightened, because she had a vague suspicion in her mind that her movements were watched by certain persons."

186. *Gain* : Reach.

187. *Silken, hushed, and chaste* : This series of adjectives fully works up the pure, serene atmosphere of her chamber, all decked in silk.

188. *Took covert* : Took shelter, hid himself.

188. *Pleas'd amain* : Mightily pleased.

189. *With agues in her brain* : Her mind was terribly agitated and full of anxiety.

189. *Ague* : A strong shivering fit.

The poet left Madeline in the dancing hall, hesitating to retire (Stanza IX). She has now (Stanza XXII) come to her holy chamber and means to start the religious rites.

190-191. : Angela was far advanced in age, and on account of her feebleness had to feel her way down the stair-case. Any help to climb down or to climb up would be welcome to her.

192. *St. Agnes' charmed maid* : She was under the magic influence of St. Agnes and was absorbed in her own thoughts.

193. *Rose like mission'd spirit* : She suddenly came out of another part of the building and was going to her chamber. But when she saw the old nurse groping in the dark for the staircase, Madeline turned aside to help and guide her with the light of the taper in her hand down the stair-case to a safe level matting. Madeline therefore appeared like an angel commissioned by God to help the old feeble nurse in her difficulty.

194. *Silver taper* : A taper fixed in a silver candle-stick.

194. *Pious care* : Dutiful anxiety. Madeline was moved by the same tender solicitude which a daughter feels for her mother or father.

195. *Aged gossip* : i.e. the old nurse. Old servants are too well-known for their talkativeness.

196. *Matting* : Level ground covered with rushes. There was no matting in those days.

196-197. *Now prepare, young Porphyro*: Notice the apostrophe. This is an intimation to Porphyro.

198. : Madeline hurries back to her holy bed without the least loss of time like the ring-dove (the wood pigeon) which flies back to her nest as soon as the danger is over. Here is a very fine simile; the very sounds convey the movement.

198. *Fray'd* : Frightened.

The scene is now (Stanza XXIII) confined to the sacred chamber where every little detail becomes significant and is brought to the notice of the reader.

200. *Pallid* : Pale.

201-202. *All akin .... air* : She altogether appeared like the spirits of the air or angels.

202. *And visions wide* : And (akin to) visions wide i.e. endowed with the power of full, wide, all-sweeping vision.

203. *No uttered .... betide* : Everything now depends upon absolute silence. The slightest stir would mar the magic effect of the sacred hour.

204. *Her heart was voluble* : How could she control herself? There was a terrible tumult in her heart—hope and fear contending against each other.

205. *Paining with .... side* : Her heart was as it were bursting to pour forth all her feelings, thus causing great pain to itself.

206-207. The nightingale is one of the most melodious of English singing birds. She is crying throughout the night to give vent to her suppressed sorrow. The poet intensifies her misfortune by imagining that the bird is tongueless and is denied the relief she can gain by pouring forth her heart in song. Her heart is therefore choked with the intensity of her emotion, and she is left to "die heart-stifled."

In Greek mythology the nightingale was Philomela, a daughter of Pandion. Her sister Procne, after her marriage with Tereus, pines for her (Philomela's) company. Tereus, while conducting Philomela to his own home, became enamoured of her, and after having offered violence to her, cut off her tongue, so that she might not disclose his crime. Shut up in a lonely place, Philo-

mela depicted her misfortunes on a piece of tapestry, which she conveyed to Procne, who released her from imprisonment. Procne avenged the insult to her sister by murdering her own son, Itys, and serving up her flesh to her husband. Just when Tereus drew his sword to punish his wife and her sister, he was changed into a hoopoe, Philomela into a nightingale, Procne into a swallow and Itys into a pheasant. This is the sad tale which the nightingale tries to convey in her sad song.

Stanza XXIV gives us a typical Keatsean description; rich, plentiful, and sensuous.

208. *Casement* : Window : The word recalls to our mind the famous lines of Keats himself :

> "Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn".

which are highly redolent of the romantic spirit.

209-210 : The large window, with its three arches, was beautifully decorated with the bunches of carved creepers, flowers, fruits and clusters of knot-grass.

210. *Knot-grass* : A common weed with intricate creeping stems and pale, pink flowers.

211. *Diamonded .... device* : Fitted with panes shaped like diamonds and decorated with curious designs or patterns.

212. *Innumerable of stains ..... dyes* : Painted in numerous resplendent colours.

213. *As are the tiger-moths .... wings* : Like the wings of the tiger-moths adorned with rich variegated colours.

213. *Tiger-moth* : A moth with richly streaked hairy wings suggesting a tiger skin.

213. *Deep-damasked* : Adorned with patterns of rich, variegated colours. The word "damask" is to be traced to Damascus, old capital of Syria, known for its richly coloured and designed tapestry.

214. *Heraldries* : Armorial bearings—family weapons and badges.

215. *Twilight saints* : Figures of saints, faint and indistinct.

215. *Emblazonings* : Heraldic designs.

216. *A shielded scutcheon*: A shield with armorial bearings painted on it.

216. *Blush'd*: Shone red.

216. *With blood .... kings*: As if painted with the blood of queens and kings. This undoubtedly suggests the noble pedigree of Madeline.

The high casement, with its beautiful carvings, the richly decorated window panes, the armorial bearings and the dim figures of saints, create the whole world of chivalry, with its pomp, splendour, and spirit of love and adventure.

Stanza XXV gives us one of the most sensuous pictures in the poem. Keats vindicates himself as a disciple of the Poet's Poet, Spenser. We find here a warm, rich, lovely picture of Madeline summed up in the words—"a splendid angel".

218. *Warm gules*: Rich varied colours amongst which the red colour is most prominent. *Gules*, in the heraldic language, means 'red."

218. According to the expert opinion of the scientists, refraction of the rays of the moon takes place only if the glass be sufficiently thin. But in poetry, it is always the truth of probability that is followed. If the poet can work up a pleasant illusion, the reader is only too willing to allow him certain liberties. As Coleridge puts it, "willing suspension of disbelief" is the highest miracle that an imaginative poet can achieve. We quote the following few words from Prof. Sisson's edition of the poem :—

"The painter Millias avers that this (the refraction of moonlight) is not possible. May be not. But this is a fairy-land, and this is a fairy moon. And if it is not possible, it ought to be."

219. *Grace*: Divine mercy.

219. *Boon*: Favour. She begs for one favour—that is the fulfilment of her desire of getting a vision of her future husband culminating in her marriage with him.

220. *Rose bloom .... prest*: Soft, reddish moon-light fell upon her hands which were joined together in prayer. The soft reddish moon-light is compared to the fresh colour of a rose.

220. *Rose bloom .... prest* : To paraphrase these words would be to take away the very bloom of the picture. It is only to be felt and enjoyed. *Rose-bloom* is a beautiful phrase for the soft-reddish light—the "**warm gules**"—of the "wintry moon".

220. *Together prest* : Joined together in prayer.

221. *Amethyst* : A purple or violet colour ; literally, a precious stone of purple or violet colour.

222. *On her hair a glory* : Her head was surrounded by a halo of light like that of a saint.

223. *Newly drest* : Freshly clothed in all the radiance of an angel, fit to be received in heaven.

224. *Save wings .... heaven* : She was really a '*splendid angel*'—only she had no wings, with which angels are endowed.

224. *Porphyro .... faint* : Poor Porphyro is simply overpowered by Madeline's divine splendour.

225. *Freed from mortal taint* : Free from any trace or vestige of sin ; absolutely sinless.

Stanza XXVI : This description of Madeline undressing and retiring reminds us of Shakespeare's Lucrece similarly going to bed. This is youthful poetry—extremely sensuous and perhaps may lend itself to be criticised as voluptuous. Like a true Greek, however, Keats is a worshipper of beauty, in the concrete and abstract form.

226. *Anon .... revives* : Very soon Porphyro recovers his senses, and begins to observe her movements in detail.

228. *Warmed jewels* : Warmed by close contact with her body.

229. *Loosens .... bodice* : As the Elizabethan poet would put it,

"Beauty's self does she remain,
When all her robes are gone."

231. *Like a mermaid.... weed* : This simile is illumining indeed ! Madeline appears to be a sea-nymph with all her beauty and mystery.

232. *Pensive* : Lost in thought.

232. *Dreams awake* : She is so much absorbed in her sweet fancies that she is unconscious of everything around her.

234. *But dares not .... is fled* : If she ventured to look behind, the magic vision would at once pass away and she would not get the vision of her future husband.

235. *Nest* : Her small room or bed.

236. *Wakeful swoon* : She was in a trance and so unconscious of everything around her, but was not really asleep.

237-238. : Care-charming sleep is stealing upon her and giving sweet rest to both her body and mind. She is quite tired with performing the rigorous religious rites of St. Agnes' Eve.

237. *Poppied warmth* : Soothing or refreshing drowsiness of sleep.

238. *Soul fatigued away etc.* : Her soul was so tired out that it left the body and flew away. There is here a reference to the idea that the soul of a person leaves his body during his sleep.

240. *Haven'd* : Sheltered like a ship in its haven or harbour.

241. *Clasped .... pray* : Sleep appeared to have as firm a hold on her as a Christian has on his prayer book (*missal*), which he wants to protect from the dark complexioned pagans. This simile in no way adds to the beauty of the picture.

241. *Swart* : Swarthy, dark in complexion.

241. *Paynims* : Pagans, heathens.

242. *Blinded* : Protected with blinds.

243 : A beautiful simile. The idea that a full blown rose may again be turned into a bud is an impossibility. But it is a fine stroke of the poet's fancy fully conveying Madeline's snugness and cosiness.

This stanza is pronounced by critics as the most exquisite in the poem. The imagery rises from one point of beauty to another till it culminates in the highest point in the last line.

244 : Porphyro was secretly brought to his paradise—Madeline's chamber—and was now in raptures at the beautiful sight.

244. *Entranced*: Enchanted, transported with joy.

246. *Listen'd to her breathing*: Because he wanted to make sure that she was fast asleep.

246-247. *If it chanced .. tenderness*: If it happened to make that soft sound which belongs to such breathing in peaceful sleep.

248-249. *Which .... breath'd himself*: When he was sure that she was quietly, steadily breathing, that she was fast asleep, he felt relieved as if a great burden was taken off his mind.

250. *As fear .... wilderness*: Like a person who is frightened in a vast desert. Fear is here personified.

250. *Noiseless as .... wilderness*: Normally in a simile the standard of comparison is more concrete than the object of comparison. Here the order is reversed. The slow creeping movement of Porphyro on the carpet is compared to fear creeping steadily into the heart of a wanderer lost in a vast desert.

251. *Hush'd carpet*: The carpet must be very thick and heavy, and therefore did not produce any sound when he walked on it.

251. *The hushed .... stept*: The repetition of the sibilant ("s") almost echoes the quiet movement.

Stanza XXIX effectively contrasts the hushed silence of Madeline's chamber with the boisterous mirth in the adjoining hall.

254. *Soft he set etc.*: He placed a table softly without making the least noise.

255. *Half-anguished*: He was in great anxiety lest he should make noise and awaken her.

256. *A cloth .. jet*: The table cover is a fine piece of embroidery in gold, black, and deep-red threads.

257. *O for .. amulet*: Porphyro earnestly wished he were in possession of some charm or spell by which he would throw Madeline into deep sleep.

257. *Amulet*: An object which has the magic virtue of protecting a person from some evil or disease. It is worn on the armour or neck.

257. *Morphean*: Belonging to Morpheus, god of dreams and sleep.

259. *Clarinet* : A wooden musical instrument the notes of which are heard to a long distance.

260. *Affray* : Usually a noun meaning a breach of peace by fighting ; it is used here in the sense of 'affright' = frighten.

261 : The closing of the door of the hall comes to him as an immense relief. He was anxious to finish his preparations of the feast before Madeline awoke from her sleep.

Stanza XXX is another feast of description as rich and plentiful as the feast of the fruits heaped on the table by the hero.

262. She was fast asleep and looked very enchanting with her azure-coloured eye-lids.

262. *Azure-lidded* : With azure or blue eye-lids.

263. *Blanched* : White, pure.

263. *Lavender'd* : Perfumed with lavender—a scent prepared from an aromatic shrub of that name.

265. *Candied apple* : Apple preserved by coating with sugar-candy.

265. *Quince* : Pear-shaped fruit.

265. *Plum* : Roundish fleshy fruit, with sweet pulp.

267. *Lucent* : Shining.

267. *Tinct* : Tinged, coloured.

268. *Manna* : Lit. dew supplied as food to Israelites by the Great God—The Old Testament (Exod. Ch. XVI). Here it means a delicious food.

268. *Argosy* : A large merchant vessel (esp. of Venice).

268-269. *In argosy .... Fez* : Brought in a merchant vessel from Fez.

269. *Fez* : A town in French Morocco, later on famous for its reddish caps.

270: All delicacies are brought from Samarkand, (Central Asia) noted for its silken fabrics, and from the forests of Lebanon (Palestine and Syria) where cedars abound.

270. *Silken Samarkand* : Notice the alliteration.

271-273 : Stroke after stroke of the poet's pen suggests the brilliance of the scene ; the hand is glowing, the dishes are golden, the baskets bright, of shining silver.

273. *Of wreathed silver*: Made of silver threads skilfully interwoven.

275. *Filling .... light*: The chill, cold air in the room was scented with the sweet odour of the various delicacies.

276. *Seraph*: The seraph belongs to the highest order of angels.

277. *Thine eremite*: One who adores or worships you like a devotee.

277. *Eremite*: Hermit.

279. *My soul doth ache*: My heart is agonised with love.

281. *Shaded*: Protected; was not disturbed.

282. *Dusk curtains*: The dark curtains of her bed.

282-283. *'t was ...... stream*: She seemed to be under a strong midnight spell, which it was as impossible to break as to melt a frozen stream.

284. *Lustrous*: Bright, shining.

284. *Salvers*: Trays, usually of gold or silver.

285. *Broad....lies*: Arches of reflected moon-light proceeding from the shining salvers decorated the carpet below.

286. *It seem'd .... redeem*: The spell or magic influence on Madeline was so strong that it seemed impossible for him to awaken his beloved from that deep sleep.

288: For a while he was lost in thought and in strange fancies.

288. *Entoil'd*: Caught in a snare.

288. *Woofed phantasies*: Strange fancies woven together.

Stanza XXXIII. At last Porphyro hits upon a very effective plan and we see for the first time the hero and the heroine facing each other; a very romantic situation is created by the poet.

289. *Awakening up*: From his "woofed phantasies" he now recovers.

290. *Tumultuous*: With great excitement raging in his heart.

291. *Long since mute*: Not heard of for many years.

292. *Provence*: A province in the South-east of France, associated with old romantic literature.

292. *"La belle dame sans mercy"* : (French) The fair lady without mercy. Keats himself wrote in May 1820 a romantic ballad of the same title.

293. *Touching the melody* : Playing the tune or song on his lute. *Touching* here means 'producing the tunes gently.'

297. *Upon his knees he sank* : Porphyro knelt before Madeline, just in the same manner as in the days of chivalry a knight knelt before his Lady-love, to pay homage to her.

297. *Pale ....stone* : Probably the first feeling of Porphyro was a sense of guilt at having disturbed the sacred dream of Madeline. He is therefore pale and looks more like a statue than a human being.

A fine tense moment in the story is described in stanza XXXIV.

298-299 : Though fully awake, the dream still continues to haunt her mind and she seems to be dreaming still.

299. *The vision of her sleep* : St. Agnes had granted her the vision of Porphyro, her future husband, in her sleep.

300. *There was .... change* : She realised the difference between the Porphyro of her dream and the real Porphyro kneeling before her.

301. *The blisses of her dream* : The ineffable joy and happiness she experienced when she had the vision of Porphyro in her dream.

303. *Witless words* : Meaningless words.

304. *While still .. keep* : Still thinking of her dream, she was mechanically gazing upon Porphyro.

306. *She looked so dreamingly* : She seemed to be still in her dream.

Madeline's words of love in Stanza XXXV are addressed to the Porphyro of her dream, who played a song to her and avowed his love. All this, as we see in the following stanzas, only deepens the bewilderment of the real Porphyro kneeling before her.

308. *At sweet tremble* : Singing in a sweet tremulous manner.

309. *Tuneable* : Musical.

309. *Every sweetest vow* : Every promise of ardent love.

310. *And ... clear* : Obviously the Porphyro of her dream is a heavenly being.

310. *Spiritual* : Calm and serene.

310. *Clear* : Lustrous.

311. *Drear* : Dreary, cheerless, sad.

312-313 : Her heart yearns for the heavenly Porphyro, his sweet, plaintive song and deep love.

313. *Those looks immortal* : That god-like expression on the face.

313. *Complainings dear* : Complaints which are the outcome of deep, genuine love.

315. *If thou diest* : She was afraid he might die, because he continued to be in the kneeling posture, perfectly silent and still—a veritable statue.

316. *Beyond a mortal man* : Madeline's words of deep love filled Porphyro's heart with a passion rarely felt by a human being.

317. *Voluptuous accents* : Words or expressions full of passionate love.

318. *Ethereal* : Lifted into heaven by the ecstasy of love.

318. *Flush'd* : Blood rushed to his face, because of the strong excitement in his heart.

318-319. *Like a throbbing star .... deep repose* : Like a twinkling star in the calm, blue sky.

317-20. *He arose .... melted* : The pleasurable excitement at the words of his beloved drives off his pallor, and brings back the rosy colour and glow of health and life, so that he is once more the heavenly being (*ethereal*) in the eyes of his lady ('unto her dream he melted').

320-21. *As the rose .... violet* : Porphyro as he rises, ethereal and flushed, becomes one with the Porphyro of her dream to the great joy of Madeline. One fails, however to appreciate this simile of the rose and the violet blending together, unless one takes the Porphyro on earth and the Porphyro in heaven to correspond to the rose and the violet in this line.

322. *Solution sweet* : A very happy and harmonious mixture. This complete blending of the two was all to the good.

323-324. *Like love's alarum .. set* : While the lovers are lost in their dreams, time runs its own course. The sleet on the

window panes outside is love's warning to the lovers that their precious moments are fleeing.

323. *Alarum* : A warning of danger.

323. *Sleet* : Hail or snow falling mixed with rain.

324. *St. Agnes' moon* : The moon on the evening of St. Agnes.

325. *Flaw-blown* : Blown scattered by the violent wind.

327. *The iced .. beat* : The storm with its cold and wind is raging outside.

328. *No dream, alas* ! : Madeline is sorry that her dream was broken and she was awakened to find the stern reality of life. She has lost the bliss of the dream. She was afraid lest Porphyro might leave her there. She would then pass her life in utter misery and languish away.

331. *My heart .. thine* : There is but one heart between us two.

332. *Though thou forsakest .. thing* : Even if you betray me who entirely trusted you.

333. *A dove forlorn .... unpruned wing* : When a bird is ill, its wings are ruffled and it does not trim them.

333. *Forlorn* : Forsaken, lonely.

335. *May I be ..... blest* : Every chivalrous knight thought it a blessed bondage to be ever in the service of his beloved. We listen in the Stanza (XXXVIII) to the conventional eloquence of the lover.

336. *Beauty's shield* : The protector of her beautiful person.

336. *Heart-shap'd* : As expansive and full of love as human heart.

336. *Vermeil dyed* : Painted bright red.

337. *Silver shrine* : Pure white shrine where the lover could worship and find rest. A lover is often compared to a pilgrim who goes on a long journey to visit and worship at the shrine of his saint.

340. *I will not .. nest* : I will not take away anything from this chamber of yours except you, my sweetheart.

341-342. *If thou thinkest .. infidel* : If you think me, who am no uncultured heathen, worthy of your trust.

In stanza XXXIX Porphyro proposes that she should elope with him to his own home.

343-344 : Porphyro likes to believe that the storm is sent by the fairies or elves. Though ferocious in effect, it is a blessing in disguise.

346. *Bloated wassailers* : Drunkards at the feast who were intoxicated to the full.

349. *Drown'd .... Rhenish* : Drunk heavily and had become unconscious of everything around them.

349. *Rhenish* : Choice wine imported from the Rhine.

349. *Mead* : Fermented honey and water as alcoholic drink.

349. *Sleepy* : possessing the virtue of bringing on sleep.

Stanza XL : Madeline instinctively trusts Porphyro and agrees to his proposal.

353. *Sleeping dragons* : 'Blood-thirsty race', heavily drunk.

353. *Dragon* : Literally means a fire-breathing monster like the winged snake.

354. *At glaring watch* : Perhaps some of them might be wide awake keeping vigilant watch.

355. *Darkling* : (archiac) In the dark.

358. *Arras* : Heavy screens hung loosely round the walls of the room.

358. *Rich with etc.* : Adorned with the figures of horsemen, hawks and hounds worked into them.

360 : A fine realistic picture. The long thick carpets were tossed up by violent gusts of wind.

361-362. *The glide .. phantoms* : The night is about to dawn into day and the lights are flickering in the stormy wind. This is just the hour for the spirits to vanish into the air. Porphyro and Madeline are rightly described as phantoms in their present state.

361. *The wide hall* : This was the very hall in which the revelry was held. But all the barons and knights were dead-drunk and unconscious of what was happening around them.

363. *In uneasy sprawl* : With his limbs stretched on the ground in a careless, ungainly manner on account of excess of drink.

365. *Shook his hide* : Shook his sides to shake off his drowsiness .'Hide' which means 'skin' is used here in sense of sides.

366. *But his .... owns* : The intelligent faithful dog recognises Madeline as one of the inmates of the house.

368. *Foot-worn stones* : The pavement worn away by the constant walking of the inmates on it.

369. *Upon its hinges groans* : The door makes a harsh, grating noise as it turns on its hinges.

367-369 : These give a vivid picture of the quiet, romantic escape of the lovers.

Stanza XLII sums up the fortunes of all the characters in the story. The end is simple but very effective.

370. *Aye, ages .. ago* : This is a very old ancient story.

372-375. *That night .. be nightmar'd* : The old Baron and his warrior guests had the most dreadful dreams about witches, demons, and death that night. The storm outside the castle corresponds to the storm in the hearts of the inmates.

373. *Shade and form* : Shadowy form ; phantoms—an instance of the figure of speech called *hendiadys*.

374. *Coffin-worm* : A worm that feeds upon the corpse enclosed in the coffin.

375. *Be-nightmar'd* : Oppressed by terrible dreams. '*Benightmare*' is a verb formed from the noun 'night-mare' by adding the prefix '*be*'.

376. *Meagre face deform* : Her thin, fleshless, ugly face.

376. *Palsy-twitch'd* : Afflicted by palsy.

377. *Ave* : A prayer to Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. The prayer in Latin is '*Ave Maria*' = 'Hail Mary'.

377. *After thousand aves told* : After the prayer had been repeated a thousand times.

377. *Told* : Counted.

378. *Unsought for* : Clean forgotten.

378. *Slept .. ashes cold* : Died while praying in the midst of the cold ashes.

The story starts with the Beadsman and ends with him.

—THE END—

KPH

ANNAS. 12